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IDYLLS *of*  
OLD HUNGARY

M. E. FRANCIS

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# **IDYLLS OF OLD HUNGARY**





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BY

M. E. FRANCIS

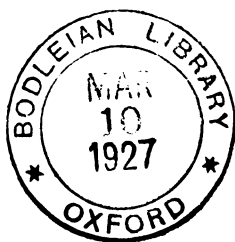
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"DORSET DEAR," "DARK ROSALEEN," "YOUNG  
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SHEED & WARD

31 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON, E.C.

*Published - - December 1926*



*Printed in Great Britain*



## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	9
THE FOREST HUT - - - - -	31
A SLAVONIAN SHYLOCK - - - - -	64
BERTHE'S DREAM-MELODY - - - - -	83
PISTA'S SHIRT-SLEEVES - - - - -	110
MARISKA AND THE GARDEN-BOY - - - - -	148
THE LITTLE JEW GIRL - - - - -	166
THE COUNTESS AND THE FRYING-PAN - - - - -	180



## INTRODUCTION

THE "Old Hungary" of these pages is not the Hungary of very ancient times, but Hungary as I knew it, many years before it became a republic. To speak more precisely, it was at the very beginning of this century that, in company with some members of my family, I paid a long visit to the charming woman hereinafter called the *Châtelaine*, or the Lady of the Schloss.

How well do I remember alighting at the little wayside station on a glowing August afternoon ; the last stage of our journey from Presburg onwards having been accomplished in an exceedingly dilatory fashion. As the train jogged along through the wide plains, all alike golden at this hour, through flax alternated with maize, and beans with wheat, it stopped extremely often, sometimes at insignificant stations and sometimes at no station at all, to allow groups of peasants to climb into the carriages from the fields, or to admit of the engine driver and the guard exchanging news with a similar group who had signalled to them from the scene of their labours.

But at length, as I say, we arrived, and there was the *Châtelaine* standing in the middle of the

line, waving her pretty little plump hands, and gazing upwards with those lovely deep blue eyes of hers full of welcome.

As we clambered down from our high-perched carriage we were gathered, impetuously and apparently all at once, into her embrace, and hurried to the road where two little victorias each drawn by a pair of fiery little horses (bred on her own estate in lower Hungary) were waiting to receive us.

Our luggage? Oh, the Herr Inspector would see to that.

"This is the Herr Inspector," here the Châtelaine, relapsing into German, effected the introduction of a stalwart, bearded individual who had followed us from the platform. "His own carriage is waiting for him there, and the cart. We will go on, for you must be tired."

Behold a third little victoria, another pair of restless little horses, another coachman—in peasant dress this one, whereas the conductors of the leading carriages were in full Magyar costume. The cart, constructed as it was of unbarked fir poles, evoked the admiration of the artist member of the party. But there was no time to examine it. We were bundled into the little victorias in the twinkling of an eye, and were soon flying along amid clouds of dust, over the deeply rutted roads—if roads they could be called, for they more closely resembled farm tracks, and the Châtelaine told us that in

winter they were practically impassable. But they were bordered with young acacias, the foliage of which, doubtless lovely in spring, now formed a golden lacework over our heads, through which the distant Carpathians, translucent at this hour, shone radiantly blue.

Here was the village—a prosperous-looking little village consisting of a long double row of houses all with gaily painted walls—blue and buff and pink, with here and there a white one decorated with streaks of orange and crimson. The roofs, too, were picturesque, being for the most part thatched, and finishing at the eaves with a curious sort of fringe; others were made of little slabs of wood, moss-grown and stained by the weather. The owner's name was scrawled upon the beam over the lintel, and surmounted in most places by a painted cross. Before every door was an earthen mound looking rather like an ant-hill, and resembling it in fact in more ways than one; for beneath it, in a deep hole, was contained all the owner's treasure: corn, beans, potatoes—the little store which his toil had wrung from the earth, all the sustenance of the family.

Here and there was a woman beating hemp, her brown face shielded from the rays of the sun by a coloured handkerchief; her figure curiously alert and graceful in its weekday attire—the wide-sleeved bodice fitting into the stiff buckram corset



to which was attached a many-pleated hempen petticoat spun by her own hands. Rough embroidery on sleeves and apron lent the necessary touch of colour ; the blue eyes of the Slovak flashed from beneath her brilliant headgear. Young girls were winnowing beans a little further down, by the simple expedient of shaking a sieve in a breezy corner ; a man with a round, flower-bedecked hat set low over deep brown eyes—a Hungarian this, with bare feet thrust into what were apparently Turkish slippers, was driving a team of oxen up the street—magnificent beasts, milk-white, and standing sixteen hands high, with horns measuring six feet from tip to tip.

A cart made of round poles dashed past piled with freshly cut fodder, and drawn by two well-bred horses—small, finely-made animals with delicate heads that would have looked more in place in plated harness than in this rough panoply of chain and rope. The carpenter, seeming cool and at ease in his baggy canvas clothes, worked in front of his house ; a distant *chink chink* sounded from the forge. We were surprised to see a woman plastering her house, pausing every now and then to draw with her slender brown forefinger patterns on the wet surface, pomegranates and curving leaves, the lines wonderfully bold and sweeping ; during the long cold winter months the Châtelaine told us she would work out similar designs on coarse

linen, the produce of her own fields, with coloured threads spun and dyed by herself.

And here was the Schloss. A Hungarian Schloss, like a French Château, is, generally speaking, not a castle proper, but a large and comfortable country house. To our surprise the front door was locked—a necessary precaution, our hostess informed us, as the dear delightful Slovak peasantry of those days were somewhat light-fingered, and there were, besides, gipsy marauders in the neighbourhood. Even her own people, deeply attached to her though they were, had a certain weakness in this respect. It was necessary to keep all stores, etc., carefully locked up; watchmen slept in garden and orchard, gates were padlocked, and wheelbarrows when not in use were chained to the wall.

We were ushered upstairs to the rooms allotted to us which opened off a central saloon used as a general meeting place. A typical note was at once struck, it seemed to us, by the furniture of these bedrooms, for, according to Hungarian custom, the floors were uncarpeted, but the looking-glasses were of silver. The beds, however, were of English make, and boasted English blankets and eiderdowns instead of the mountainous feather-beds which as a rule were the only additions to the sheets. Our hostess, who had lived many years in England, informed us proudly that we should have baths—

real baths—in the morning, and that *hot* water for washing would be supplied once a day.

On the following morning at six o'clock—we kept early hours at the Schloss—I was awakened with a start by a little Slovak maid who was dutifully burrowing under the bedclothes for my hand, in order to bestow a reverent kiss upon it. Scarcely had she withdrawn than a tall handsome young man in equally picturesque dress, entered the room, bearing the promised cans of hot water. He too kissed my hand and then proceeded to prepare my bath.

Out to breakfast under the great plane tree and then, after partaking of the delicious rye bread, the boiled *kukurutz* (maize cobs), honey, and quantities of fruit, we made the rounds of the outside premises. First the courtyard with the huge factory-like building called the *major* which contained the labourers' quarters. Our hostess pointed out proudly that under her rule each family was allowed a room to itself, and half a kitchen. Before, it seemed, four families had to crowd into one chamber. The wages of these labourers were paid chiefly in kind, a certain proportion of every crop being allotted to each, their earnings in money averaging about £3 a year.

But they wanted for nothing: under the patriarchal system which prevailed, the Châtelaine provided for all their needs, from the attendance of

midwives at births to the provision of coffins for the dead. Moreover, they enjoyed certain other rights, such as grazing for their livestock, land on which to grow hemp for their clothes, pasture for the geese which were a source of profit for the community in many ways, the feathers being used for bedding, while the sale of the finer down and of the slaughtered fowl brought in a sum sufficient to supply a whole family with the high boots necessary for holiday wear.

The stables contained many pairs of the well-bred horses already mentioned, and were beautifully kept by their Hungarian attendants. The ox-stables were for the most part empty, the working oxen being afield with their drivers, but in a few stalls set apart, stately beasts were helping themselves from mangers piled with the green blades of Indian corn—these were to be sold for beef.

In the centre of the great farmyard was the old-type well whence the water was drawn in wooden pails attached to a tapering tree trunk, which pointed skywards when not in use. Some women were naïvely washing their faces in one of the buckets, being presently elbowed aside by a man who dipped in his shaggy head, and then went his way. The Châtelaine expatiated on the quality of the water which, she announced triumphantly, was so excellent that they used no other for drinking purposes. The Hausknecht, indeed, at that moment appeared,

and negligently tipping out the bucket on the neighbouring manure-heap, dipped it again into the well, and filled the glass jugs which the guests, with some chagrin, recognized as having appeared on the dinner table the previous night.

They subsequently wandered through orchard and garden, and visited the underground cellars where wine white and red, made on the Châtelaine's southern estate, was stored.

But I should never have done if I were to relate in detail all the wonders of that first day, still less of those that followed. I could never describe the appealing beauty of the scenery, the friendliness of the people of all ranks. Often was the proverb which then obtained in Hungary "*Les amis de nos amis sont nos amis*" exemplified in our case.

We made many expeditions to neighbouring houses, setting out sometimes at six o'clock in the morning, having been refreshed before our departure by a sweet omelet, considered by our hostess a form of nourishment appropriate to that early hour, to be regaled with "an English breakfast" on arriving at our destination. The whole party was always invited, it being considered rude to leave out any guest who chanced to be staying at a friend's house. Everyone was received with cordiality and even with affection, the extent of the hospitality offered being occasionally embarrassing. One could not, without giving offence, I was

told, refuse a single dish—and there were sometimes nine courses!—the seven glasses which flanked one's plate were filled to overflowing, and as the wine was the produce of our host's own vines one was obliged to taste the contents of all, from the sweet pink champagne which inaugurated the repast, to the Tokay which succeeded coffee. On one occasion tall tumblers of beer appeared after the soup, but these the guests were permitted to refuse.

But how charming were these neighbours of the *Châtelaine*! We seemed to be back in the middle of the eighteenth century: the antiquated customs, the enormous number of retainers, the seriousness with which the ladies of the family appeared to apply themselves to the science of housekeeping, the simple, old-fashioned courtesy demonstrated by our entertainers in many quaint ways all served to strengthen this impression.

I recollect on one occasion being conducted, simultaneously with the *Châtelaine*, to our places at the top of the table, the master of the house, being the only man present, lending an arm to each. What a contrast to latter-day methods!

In another house I observed with astonishment the number of instructors who sat among the children practically "below the salt." The French Abbé was there, who said grace for us, governesses French, English and Hungarian—the dancing-master, the fencing-master. The children of these

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country magnates were never sent to school, but every branch of education was sedulously attended to.

The fair-haired scions of this particular family were dressed, boys and girls alike, in English sailor suits, their mother evincing immense interest in the embroidered muslin worn by the youngest member of our party. She admired it and even fingered it, and then, turning to the Châtelaine and her elder guests, made gracious and laudatory remarks on their apparel and such ornaments as they wore. Even the "Baroness Betty" who figures in this book, was not left out: her well-worn black silk and antiquated onyx brooch coming in for their share of eulogy. I subsequently discovered that this procedure formed part of the code of hospitable etiquette observed by Hungarian ladies of that date. It would have been considered unkind and impolite to have abandoned it.

The pupils of the dancing-master gave a performance in our honour after the repast—the fencing-master remaining darkly apart. Fencing was studied at that time with serious intent.

"One never knows," remarked the father of a seventeen-year-old son, "when a young man may be called upon to defend his honour."

"But surely duelling is forbidden to Catholics?" I suggested.

He bowed gravely.

"*Quand il est question d'honneur, Madame,*" he said; and left the sentence unfinished.

In another schloss we were entertained most pleasantly by a very old lady whose gracious but dignified manners were quite *de l'ancien régime*; and her charming, friendly daughter. In the course of the afternoon an unexpected pleasure was provided for us by the son of the house, who, entering from his fields, where he had been superintending harvesting operations and incidentally putting in practice a precept of the Abbé Kneip, sat down at the piano just as he was, and played like a virtuoso. Though his bare feet had been hastily thrust into Turkish slippers their mastery of the pedal equalled the firmness and precision with which his shapely sunburnt fingers pressed the keys.

Memories of other visits recur to me; the pretty sprightly mistress of one house being treated by the Châtelaine with a certain distant politeness which seemed to me unaccounted for by her subsequent announcement that the lady's grandfather had been a Jew—"a converted one," she added after a pause, anxious to be just.

"But surely," intimated someone, "that should make things all right?"

"In Hungary, *not*," said the Châtelaine firmly. "It is for the sake of her mother-in-law, an old friend of mine, that I visit her."



Indeed in the Hungary of that time the Jew of all ranks was treated as a pariah.

A most interesting episode was an invitation to a certain historic mansion, one of the many residences of a wealthy magnate of those parts. It came suddenly into view as our carriages rounded the bend in the long avenue. This avenue in itself was remarkable, being bordered on each side by ramparts of green, first a low thickset hedge, then a line of laburnums, and finally a very wall of trees, a monstrous pleached hedge of beech rising for several feet in an impenetrable screen, above which the branches were allowed to wave freely. The Schloss was an immense white building, two-storied for the most part, though a portion of it existed before the coming of the Magyars. The ancient chapel, surmounted by its quaint tower, was over a thousand years old; the curious reredos within, representing the Nativity, was carved out of a single tree, and had been presented to an ancestor of the family three hundred years before, by the reigning King of Hungary in acknowledgment of his services in war.

His descendants, like many Hungarians of their rank, maintained most friendly relations with their sovereign, who had visited them on more than one occasion. We were shown the gorgeous room in which Franz Joseph slept in 1891, which had been refurnished in Empire style in his honour. The

loyal subjects of "the *King*," as they called him, were not allowed to share in the expenses of his visit. Though it was his custom to bring a suite of eighty persons with him on such occasions, he not only maintained his own retinue but the household of his host, during his stay.

This was no trifling matter, for the Schloss was so large that even when the family were not in residence, thirty servants were required for its upkeep.

We were shown riding-school and theatre, orange groves and pineries, gardens and stables, and were particularly interested in examining the carriage preferred by our hostess, which was drawn by seven horses. These were all driven from the box by one man, who held three reins in each hand, and controlled his team chiefly by sounds—a soft whistle to indicate a halt, a click of the tongue for a trot, while an odd purring note urged them to a gallop.

Luxury was everywhere in evidence, yet mingling with it was that odd streak of simplicity—I had almost said barbarism—which I had noticed elsewhere. We washed our hands in a silver basin with cold water, and without soap, until the *Châtelaine* produced the tablet with which she had provided herself.

"Soap, you see, is a personal thing," she explained.

The furniture was magnificent. The carpets

were of the richest imaginable pile, but they were protected by little paths of cheap drugget.

In this house our hosts spoke very perfect English. Elsewhere the conversation was chiefly carried on in French, that being the language in ordinary use during the Châtelaine's young days. Of late it had been replaced by what she called "*gemütlich Deutsch*." Hungarian was seldom spoken, though it was learnt as in duty bound. A variety of languages was indeed necessary in those days. The rising generation acquired English first, then French, then Hungarian; and German last, in order to ensure a perfect pronunciation, though in familiar speech they were permitted to relapse into *gemütlich Deutsch*. Slovak was also essential for converse with the peasants in Northern Hungary.

I think it was on our return from this expedition that we encountered a band of gipsies—ragged, savage-looking creatures, half naked, with shaggy hair almost covering their tanned faces. One terrifying giant ran after our carriage, clinging to the hood; and the coachman with loud oaths struck him savagely with the whip and made the horses gallop. The man fell back into the roadway, cursing and shaking his fist. Seeing my shocked face the Châtelaine explained that the severity of Tamás was necessary. These gipsies were dangerous folk. Thereupon, as we drove homewards through

the dusk she related various instances of the gipsies' evil deeds, while the light carriage swung from side to side, and Tamás, with a nervous glance ever and again over his shoulder, kept his horses going at their utmost speed until the Czigáne were left far behind.

Yet no one appreciated gipsy music more thoroughly than the Hungarians.

The first time we heard a gipsy band was at Pöstyény, a fashionable watering-place about fifteen miles away from Schloss Petheöfalva, which was renowned for its sulphur baths.

The long drive lay over the plain, of course—the plain that stretched far and near, always beautiful and never monotonous. Over it moved the life that was the life of the soil. Across and across this plain went toiling oxen and crawling ploughs. Barefoot in the stubble, men and women wielded their three-pronged forks or stooped to bind the sheaves, while flocks of geese, and herds of cattle, goats, and swine grazed on the rough pastures.

On arriving at the public gardens of Pöstyény we hear, to our consternation, that the band had already ceased playing. But, through the efforts of the master sweep of the district, a gentleman of no small importance who possessed not only a fine house of his own but four teams of horses, the Châtelaine secured the services of a gipsy band, which stationed itself under the verandah where

we were seated, and played to us while we dined. The men watched our faces, and the more pleasure we evinced the more their smiles broadened. They had no notes, and the music came from their souls with indescribable fire and pathos.

Besides visits to the neighbours, a day spent at Tyrnau, a quaint little country town where the Châtelaine had a house of her own, and excursions to various points of interest in the country, our hostess conveyed us to Buda Pesth and entertained us royally for two or three days at the Hotel Hungária. There we heard a gipsy band in its full perfection, besides enjoying a cuisine that was typical of the tastes of the nation, and being frequently refreshed with *spritzas*, the most ambrosial of drinks. We, at least, thought so as we sucked the golden sparkling liquid through straws delicately inserted between piled-up lumps of ice. Mr. Pickwick could not have enjoyed his "cobbler" more; and the *spritzas* were surely more delicate and less inebriating.

In truth we had need of refreshment, for the heat was excessive, and our sightseeing was strenuous. I recall, confusedly enough at this distance of time, the exploring of churches and palaces, public gardens and parks, the picturesqueness of the old parts of the town, a luncheon on an island on the Danube; but, above all, a wonderful procession of peasants from all over the country who had assem-

bled to take part in a religious congress. The differing physique of the people, the magnificence of their gala dress embroidered with gold, silver and jewels, the intermingling of tongues—Hungarian, Slovak, Czech—all produced an effect which it is impossible to forget and difficult to analyse. Intensity of religious feeling was mingled with something untameable, almost savage—indeed some of the delegates from Lower Hungary, magnificent specimens of humanity though they were, seemed to us fitting descendants of the barbarians who invaded the Roman Empire. Delegates of high rank were there, besides these sons of the mountains and the plains, notabilities from every part of Hungary. But grandee and peasant, Hungarian and Slovak, all alike displayed the same depth of faith and devotion as they knelt in the dust at the outdoor Benediction.

We carried away a variety of impressions as the train conveyed us on our return journey, through the vinegar trees with their glowing foliage of yellow and red, on the Monday morning. We remained interested, excited, almost bewildered by the life and movement and endless variety of those three days, but oh, how tired we were ! Our train started at six o'clock in the morning to avoid the heat, but we had not proceeded an hour or so on our way before the carriages were scorching, our brains seemed positively frizzling, our tongues clove to our

palates. Never shall I forget the joy and relief with which we fell upon a basketful of peaches which the Châtelaine purchased for threepence at a wayside station, supplemented later by an even more delectable water-melon.

How delightful to get back to Petheöfalva, to the quiet meals under the plane trees, to the charm of the little wood which bordered the garden, above all to the coolness and depth of the forest which formed part of the Châtelaine's estate. Forests were then, as now, an important source of income to Hungarian landowners, and besides their utilitarian purposes added greatly to the prevailing beauty. The Petheöfalva woods teemed with game of which we partook plentifully : roe-deer, hares and pheasants. At one time an enterprising neighbour had introduced rabbits, called in those parts "little English hares," there being no local word to designate these foreign rodents. But, alas, they increased so rapidly that peasant and proprietor alike bewailed their advent, and made every effort to exterminate them. There were besides partridges and wild fowl in abundance.

Crossing the forest were green drives where the grass grew thick ; frogs leaped away on all sides, green and brown and orange ; even the branches were populated by tiny green frogs which chirped an odd little joyful ditty at sunset. These Hungarian woods were unlike English woods in that they

were so varied ; oak and acacia, birch and beech, fir and pine, poplar and hazel, all grew freely there, without any particular species predominating. They swarmed with life—bird and beast and insect ; wolves were occasionally to be seen, we were told ; while the peasants believed they were inhabited by spirits, and few of them could be persuaded to enter their precincts after nightfall.

The Châtelaine recounted many legends, and regaled us with divers anecdotes of her own people as we sat in the dusk in her rose-scented, shadowy garden ; tales which, mingling with my own impressions and memories, form the basis of these idylls. I cannot conclude without a word about our hostess herself. How pretty she was, with her snow-white hair piled high on her small head, her deep blue eyes, the witty little mouth which seemed to be always smiling, the features typical of her race. Her neat little figure was always daintily arrayed, the pretty hands ever busy. She was a notable housewife, and besides ordering, and dispensing the provisions needed for the day, did a good deal of mending. Much of the exquisite napery with which her linen shelves were stored, had been repaired by herself. She would suffer no unskilled fingers to touch it, for her mother, surrounded by her more proficient maid-servants, had with their assistance spun most of it.

The Châtelaine had married an officer in the



Austrian army who strangely enough was an Englishman. Their only child had succumbed to the severity of a Hungarian winter, and lay at rest in the family burial-ground where the Châtelaine intended to lie some day. She was quaintly interested in her prospective death, and showed us with pride the pretty little coffin adorned with Louis XV bows, which she kept in readiness for that event, and the hatchment duly filled up even to her name, only the date being left blank. She also informed us that her grave was already prepared, and planted with flowers, always carefully tended.

"As I am de last of my family," she explained, "I must see to all dese t'ings myself." (In spite of more than thirty years' residence in England she had never conquered the difficulties of the "th.")

She had refused many suitors during her widowhood, one persistent wooer being in his own eyes so eligible that he could not bring himself to accept her denials.

"At last," she recounted with that witty little lifting of the lip which always charmed us, "I said to him: 'But what do you t'ink I should gain by marrying again? I am very happy as I am?' 'Oh,' he said, 'dere is de title—I have at least a fine name to offer you.' 'T'ank you,' I said, 'I have two very fine names of my own.' And so de poor man went away."

Indeed, the Châtelaine's relations had been careful to ascertain that the English wooer, who became her husband, could display the necessary sixteen quarterings, which enabled him to aspire to her hand ; else he had wooed in vain.

It was when she found herself alone in the world, after the death of her last surviving brother, that she sold the gay little London house of which so many of her English friends retain such happy memories, and devoted herself altogether to her Hungarian property, loving in particular the estate where she made her home with an affection that was almost maternal. She was indeed more a mother than a queen among her people.

Great are the changes which have taken place since the Châtelaine was laid to rest amid her Louis XV bows under her flowery coverlet. The motor tractor has invaded the wide plains ; threshing and winnowing with machinery have rendered the use of flail and sieve superfluous ; co-operative farming has brought, besides prosperity, many innovations. Electricity has come to the villages ; solid uniform houses replace the picturesque abodes of former days ; neat pavements appear to have eliminated the earthen mounds beneath which the peasants stored their produce. By all means let civilization march onwards ; yet our thoughts wander back somewhat wist-

fully to the primitive land in which we took delight.

To the dear memory of the Châtelaine and the Hungary that we knew through her, I dedicate these Idylls.

M. B.

## THE FOREST HUT

It was all the doing of the gipsy band. The Bucsfú, or village feast at Nagy-Kosztolány had just taken place with unusual pomp and ceremony; it was quite a special village feast—a centenary or something of that kind—and the inhabitants of the place had felt that nothing short of the true Czigány music could do justice to the occasion. For three days and three nights the festivities had continued; and at length such of the inhabitants of the thriving village as were not tipsy, or otherwise incapacitated, had returned to their fields and granaries, and the gipsy folk were moving onwards.

Now, it happened that their way lay through the neighbouring hamlet of Petheőfalva, and as they chanced to halt for refreshments at the village inn, the news of their advent spread like wildfire through the place. When by and by, at the instance of Javocsky, the landlord, the wild-looking musicians began to play, not the Pied Piper himself could have achieved more sudden or striking effects. From house and street, from barn and underground granary, from pasture and cornfield the folk came flocking, the old as well as the young.

Pretty Sarolta Horváth happened to be standing

at her wash-tub when the music first reached her ears ; the curious, vibrating, penetrating notes of the *tsimbol*, the passionate wail of the fiddles—how do these vagrant minstrels manage to extract such sounds from their poor instruments ? Sarolta withdrew her hands quickly from the suds, and threw back her flaxen head. Music, and gipsy music ! In another moment her slim little brown feet were skimming over the dusty pathway, heedless of her father's stentorian and ireful summons to return. He could not run after her, as Sarolta very well knew, for he had been drinking brandy during the last two days, and though he could scold and also curse sensibly enough, his legs refused to sustain him. She mingled with the little crowd of her neighbours, who came pouring from every doorway and gate, all laughing and talking eagerly, and all making for the village inn, the identity of which was announced to all comers by the branch of broom hung over the door.

The dancing was going forward in the field on the other side of the house, and thither everyone hastened. The musicians were accommodated with a bench close to the wall—brown-faced men, whose gleaming eyes darted hither and thither as their lean, dark fingers deftly moved.

Sarolta stood just within the doorway, her breath coming quickly, her big babyish blue eyes bright with excitement. She had come away in

such haste that she had not even waited to put on her high boots or her kerchief. Her round pink-and-white face was therefore fully exposed to the sun, her head crowned only by its own flaxen tresses, this lint-white hair of hers being gathered, after the fashion of her country-folk, into two plaits beginning at the centre of her forehead and wound round her head. Her attire was simple in the extreme: a loose bodice and sleeves of coarse white linen tucked into a kind of corset of canvas, which in turn formed part of a petticoat straight and plain in front but accordion-pleated at the back; a blue linen apron roughly embroidered completed her costume. Now it was well known that no self-respecting maiden would ever dream of joining an assembly in such garb as this; yet had the maddening music paused for a moment and given Sarolta liberty to think, she would scarcely have felt ashamed, for all about her were friends and neighbours similarly caught unawares. Young dandies footed it unconcernedly in their common canvas shirts and trousers; even a newly-made bride, who of all others might be supposed to go magnificently clad, had come like Sarolta in but a single petticoat.

As she glanced about her she caught the eye of a tall young fellow, whose battered hat was adorned with a cluster of sunflowers, and whose shirt was embroidered with scarlet at shoulder and wrist.

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A cigarette was in his mouth, and between two puffs of it he nodded negligently to Sarolta, who tripped forth to meet him with meek alacrity. After such a manner does the Slovak youth engage a partner. It was the Lassú or slow movement of the Scardás, and Ludovic inaugurated it, as in duty bound, by swaying gracefully and carelessly from the hips ; while Sarolta, taking up her place opposite him, moved from one foot to the other, at first almost imperceptibly, then more rapidly, then, as the music quickened and a rush of hurried notes from the *tsimbol* demonstrated that the Frisch or quick movement of the dance was beginning, she performed a series of astonishing gyrations while Ludovic waited, now swaying as before, now making long, sliding steps, now stretching out his arms to catch and sustain his little partner as she turned giddy after a prolonged and complicated twirl. Now they were whirling together, now she had dashed away and he pursued, and now the music slackened and passed once more into the minor, and again they were swaying with hands resting lightly on each other's shoulders, Ludovic's shining grey eyes looking into hers. Next came a polka, and then a waltz, danced by these bare-footed peasants on the dusty sward with a perfection of grace which might be imitated with advantage in a London ballroom.

How does the Slav come to be naturally dowered

with such grace, such instinctive sense of rhythm, even of poetry? It is not only that these lads and lasses, fresh from the plough or from the threshing-floor, move their limbs with astonishing ease and even elegance, but that they seem to comprehend the hidden meaning of the strange, wild music, to attune themselves to it, to be carried away by it. Not a motion of their lithe young bodies, not a pulse of their rapturously throbbing hearts but is inspired by the weird impassioned strains of the Czigány. In truth, this music is like no other music of our day; in bygone ages perhaps Pan may have drawn from his reedy pipes notes somewhat akin to these, and the effect no doubt was similar. The Petheőfalva folk at least listened to these fierce, sweet sounds with a sensation little short of ecstasy.

The red glow faded out of the sky, but the gipsy folk played on, and the nimble brown feet moved noiselessly over grass that was beginning to be damp with dew.

"You are the best dancer in the village, Sarolta," said Ludovic during a pause, glancing at her over the rim of his glass.

He had offered her a little sip from the glass, but she had declined; the spirit it contained was so very hot and strong—the very smell of it turned her sick, for she had learned to dread it in her own home. But she glanced up now, well pleased.



Ludovic was a very great person in the village. He had gone through his year's service as a soldier, and could tell wonderful tales about his doings out yonder in the big world. He did not seem to do very much at home, it was true, and was fond of swaggering about, a cigarette in his mouth and a little cane in his hand ; but then, he was such a very fine fellow, everyone knew he could do a great deal if he liked. It was said that he was courting Anna, the rich heiress, but he certainly did not dance with her once this evening. His words and looks were all for Sarolta—between his admiration and the music and the delight of the dance her little head was quite turned beneath its flaxen coronet.

By and by she felt a small hand plucking at her skirt, and, looking down, saw her little sister Mariska.

“ Sarolta, the father says you are to come home at once. It is supper-time, and he is thumping the table and shouting.”

“ Give him his supper,” returned the elder sister impatiently ; “ the soup is in the pot by the fire, and there is plenty of bread.”

It grew darker and darker, the figures of the dancers became indistinct, their white shirt-sleeves and light-coloured kerchiefs being alone distinguishable in the dusk ; the music continued, but spasmodically, for it must not be supposed that the gipsies played without reward. A flickering lamp,

hung just within the doorway, shone upon their swarthy faces as they sat beneath. Now and then, with a gleam of white teeth and a keen upward glance of glittering eyes, one or other would break off in his play, and call out, and then a glass would be thrust swiftly into his outstretched hand, and as swiftly emptied, and then the music would ring out once more.

Again came the little plucking hand at Sarolta's skirt.

"Sister, sister, the children are crying and the father is cursing and raving! He swears if you do not come home at once he will never let you cross the door again."

But they were playing a waltz now, and Ludovic's arm was already round Sarolta's waist. On they went, floating as it seemed over the dewy sod, the music throbbing in their ears. Ludovic had finished his cigarette, and was whispering to her disjointed phrases which she scarcely understood. She seemed to be in a dream; but all at once it was over, and the people were crowding round the gipsies, pressing small coins into their hands, offering *palinka*, beseeching them to play again.

"They must play again!" cried Ludovic. "They must play once more, if only the Rákoezy."

Indeed the Hungarian March is generally played at the close of all festivities, after the manner of our National Anthem. But the gipsies seemed too

busy laughing, jesting, and drinking to accede to this petition ; and though Sarolta, in obedience to Ludovic's instructions, kept close to him, waiting patiently on the chance of the band's striking up again, she perceived by and by that there was no likelihood of its doing so. Ludovic himself seemed to have forgotten her ; he was laughing and jesting with the rest, and alas ! his glass was more frequently replenished than any.

Suddenly someone pulled her sleeve, and she looked round, thinking that once more the importunate Mariska had come to summon her homewards ; but no, it was a Czigány, a great, swarthy fellow, with shaggy black locks almost falling into his eyes, who had thrust his leering face close to hers.

She started back with a cry :

" Ludovic ! "

But Ludovic did not hear. Looking round, she saw that all the women-folk had slipped away, and that she was alone in the midst of a crowd of men—men who now nearly all spoke thickly and laughed discordantly, and whose faces—such of those as were distinguishable in the unsteady lamplight—were flushed and distorted as her father's was after concluding a bargain with the Jew.

Sarolta had twitched away her sleeve, and, diving beneath the arms of the men nearest her, darted away from the group, and along the ill-

lighted passage of the inn, and out by the other door into the village street.

Here all was quiet, basking in the moonlight ; every door closed, every window dark.

She sped homewards like a bird, scarcely daring to turn her head lest she might find herself pursued by that dark, evil-faced gipsy ; but there was no sound near her except those produced by her own flying feet and panting breath, though the distant noise of shouting and singing gave additional impetus to her terror.

Here was home at last, the door fast shut, the quaint outer shutters, formed of slabs of straw and plaster, by which the Slovak ensures privacy, wedged firmly in the windows.

She knocked, first with the knuckles and then with the open palm of her eager little hand.

“ Let me in, let me in, Mariska ! Jankó ! Pálo ! Let me in, I say, quick : they are after me ! ”

But within all was silence. Rushing to the nearest window, which she knew was close to her father's bed, she pulled away the shutter and fell to hammering at the pane, screaming the while.

“ Father, father ! It is I, Sarolta ! ”

There was a smothered grunt, a kind of muttered roar, an indistinct murmur, and then silence. Sarolta began to batter at the pane, and all at once a little face appeared, pressed tremblingly close to the glass.

"Oh, Sarolta, go away, go away! The father says he will kill you. He frightened me and Jankó so, we thought he would kill us. He said if we let you in he would kill us. We hid in the garden till he fell asleep."

"He is asleep? Then all is safe! You can let me in now."

"Oh no, no—I dare not! He went to sleep with the poker in his hand. He said he would never, never have you in the house again."

The little head disappeared; and Sarolta, appalled by this variety of threats, fearfully replaced the shutter and stood trembling.

Where was she to go? What would become of her? Her father had driven her away. How could she ever look anyone in the face again? At this moment a fresh burst of revelry was borne upon the breeze, and, glancing back down the long moonlit street, she saw three or four dark figures come staggering forth from the inn. What if they should be the gipsies?

Without pausing to consider whither she was going, she fled as fast as her feet would carry her in the opposite direction, through the sleeping village, past the Schloss garden, past the *major*, where all was quiet as the grave; on, on. Now the orchard was left behind, and now her way lay through the narrow lane beneath the willows, followed the stony track between the allotments,

past the gamekeeper's. Yonder was the forest ! Even the gipsies would not follow her there ; but dared she enter it ? Did not all the neighbours go miles round rather than pass the forest at night ? Spirits dwelt there, it was said ; and how dark it was ! It spread out before her like a cloud.

As she stood hesitating her ears caught once more the sound of discordant laughter, and it seemed to her fancy that she heard the tread of advancing feet. Her terror of the real for the moment overpowered her dread of the unseen, and, turning swiftly, she ran up the grassy track past the army of sunflowers, whose great gleaming discs waved in the evening breeze several feet above her head. And now the forest stretched out its shadowy arms to her, and sent forth a wave of cold, spicy fragrance to greet her ; and soon its kindly protecting gloom received her and enveloped her on every side.

Sarolta shivered as she at length slackened her pace and looked around her. The dewy sod struck cold to her little heated feet ; the night air, always on the move here beneath these mysterious boughs, caressed with its icy touch her flushed cheeks and burning brow, and sent the blood speeding back to her frightened little heart. How dark it was, and what strange sounds came to her ears : rustlings and cracklings—now a great rushing, as it seemed, of wings a long way off, and now close at hand a beat as of a stealthy tread ! Once,

just behind her, she heard a kind of swishing noise, and almost screamed with terror ; it was only when she stood still that she discovered its origin ; nothing indeed more formidable than the brushing of her own skirt against the undergrowth.

The very brilliancy of the moon, striking down as it did on the birches which so thickly peopled these woods, the shining paths which transpierced the otherwise profound gloom added to the impression of mystery, of unreality. The slim white shapes of the birches, the " Ladies of the Forest," flashing out suddenly from the darkness, appeared endowed with mysterious life. Those gleaming tracks, whither did they lead ? What dark, uncanny figure might not of a sudden mar their brightness and come travelling down to meet this poor little palpitating wanderer of the night ? A wanderer whose childish soul, in addition to its unspeakable consciousness of loneliness and terror, was burdened with a sense of overwhelming guilt. The very leaves seemed to her to babble of her wickedness, the very grasses to crane their delicate heads upwards and whisper together :

" There goes Sarolta ! See the shameless girl who did not even veil her head ! There goes the girl who danced all night with Anna's lover. See Sarolta, who will never again dare to return home."

She stopped her ears as though to shut out the sound, and ran on and on, scaring the birds and

wild things of the woods, which flew shrieking under the branches or darted from beneath the undergrowth.

Was that an evil spirit sitting in the path? Nay, what she took for a horned thing was but a hare, which presently laid back its long ears and bounded into the darkness! But yonder were horned things sure enough—a herd of innocent deer, with delicate heads uplifted and sensitive nostrils testing the air. Now they too were gone, scouring away with flying feet. Sarolta paused for want of breath; not one of these timid dwellers of the woods was so tremulous as she. Besides the intangible and supernatural denizens of this lonely place, was it not haunted by others, of whom she stood in equal dread? Wolves came to this forest sometimes; during the snow they had even emerged from its precincts into the plains beyond. As Sarolta glanced round she seemed to see their flashing eyes and to feel their burning breath. She began to cry and to wail aloud.

“ Oh, woe is me! Oh, woe is me! It would be a fit end for wicked Sarolta to be devoured by wolves in the forest!”

All at once she remembered that wolves could not climb trees, and looking round her, descried a very large beech, into the branches of which she presently scrambled, securing for herself a tolerably comfortable seat between two forked



boughs. Here she sat with her little bare legs dangling over the path and her little cold hands clutching her rosary ; and at last she began to breathe more freely and to hope that though she had been a naughty, thoughtless girl, the Holy Mother would love her still and protect her. And somehow or other, as she leaned back among the boughs and laid her head against the smooth bark, she fell fast asleep, and never moved until all nature stirred and fluttered with the coming of the dawn.

It was cold—colder even than it had been during the night ; but peering up through the wet green leaves Sarolta could see the sky all pearly and silvery, with still a sprinkling of pale stars and yonder a wan moon. But, even as she gazed about her, the bough which she grasped with her stiff hands turned of a sudden rosy, and the leaves took each a little rim of fire ; and there through the branches she saw a glow rising and spreading, and then arrows of flame shot up into the milky sky, and a whole flotilla of pink and golden clouds floated out over her head, and then, lo ! it was day ! The path down there beneath her feet was turning golden, and the dew was shining and sparkling, and there were flaming patches on the tree-trunks, and the birds were calling to each other.

Sarolta stretched her cramped limbs and clambered down ; already the ground felt warm to her

feet, and for a moment the freshness and glory of the morning seemed to penetrate even to her heart. But presently the sense of forlornness came upon her once more : what should she do ? where should she go ? She began to walk mechanically—not towards home—oh, no, she dared not turn her face towards home, but along the path which seemed to lead to the sunrise. How long she walked she knew not, and she scarcely took note of her surroundings until she suddenly found herself in the midst of a very blaze of sunshine. With a start she paused and looked about her ; a clearing had been made among the trees, at the farther end of which she descried a small hut, wattled and thatched with heather, from the tiny window of which protruded the shining barrel of a gun.

As Sarolta stood petrified, gazing with wide, horror-stricken eyes, first at the sinister object and then through the aperture beyond, she became aware of other eyes fixed intently on her own, and then of the shadowy outline of a face indistinct in the darkness within. She would have liked to scream and flee from the spot, but her very terror incapacitated her, and she remained staring, mute and motionless, while first the face and then the gun-barrel disappeared, and after a moment the tall figure of a man emerged from the doorway of the hut.

At sight of him she heaved a sigh of relief, for she

saw that it was neither robber nor gipsy ; he was clad indeed in the uniform of a huntsman, grey and green, a big knife in his leathern belt and a green hat ornamented with a feather on his head. He was a man in the prime of life, whose full dark eyes and swarthy locks, together with his peculiarly aquiline features, proclaimed that he belonged to the dominant race, Magyar not Slav—a formidable-looking personage enough, as little Sarolta thought. How could she account for her presence in the forest ? It might not even be the Petheőfalva forest, for she had wandered for hours and hours, and certainly this man was a total stranger to her. And oh ! what was that lying on the grass just beside the door of the hut ? A little roe-deer, stiff and piteous, with its once beautiful eyes glazed and its poor little tongue hanging out. Sarolta looked from the hapless victim to the cruel gun, and then at the strong hands of the slayer. Had she ventured to raise her eyes to his face she would have seen that it wore a kindly expression.

“ Well, little maiden,” he said in his deep voice, and speaking the Slavonic tongue, “ how come you to be taking a walk at so early an hour ? ”

“ Oh, please, sir,” replied Sarolta tremulously, “ I have been out all night, and I—I—got lost in the forest—I don’t even know where I am ! ”

“ Now, that is a strange thing,” said he ; “ where

do you come from, child, and how do your parents allow you to be out all night ? ”

“ I come from Petheöfalva,” and here Sarolta broke off, hanging her ruffled flaxen head.

“ But how was it you were out all night ? ” he persisted.

“ I cannot tell,” muttered Sarolta, shuffling from one little slim bare foot to another.

“ Do your father and mother know of this ? ” he enquired, his deep voice booming very sternly over her head.

“ The mother is dead,” sobbed she, “ and the father would not let me in last night.”

“ So ! ”

“ Yes ; because I stayed too long at the inn, dancing. The gipsies were playing and I did not know it was so late, and when I came home the door was closed and they would not open to me.”

“ H’m, h’m, what a story ! And you spent the night in the forest ? ”

“ Yes. I ran and ran because I was afraid of the gipsies—I thought they might be coming after me ; and then when I got among the trees I was afraid of the spirits, and then I began to think about the wolves, and so I climbed into a tree and stayed there all night.”

Silence ensued. But when Sarolta glanced fearfully up from beneath her eyelids she saw that the huntsman was laughing. Yes, there he stood,

rolling his broad shoulders and showing his white teeth under his great black moustache.

“ Well, and now what will you do ? ”

“ I do not know,” said Sarolta, and began to sob again. “ I dare not got home ; my father said he would kill me.”

“ Ha ! ” said the huntsman, and paused meditatively. “ I think at least you want some breakfast.”

Sarolta said nothing, but the sudden cessation of her sobs and a grateful upward glance answered for her.

The huntsman took up the dead deer, swung it over his shoulder and led the way into the wood in the opposite direction to that by which Sarolta had come. She followed meekly, picking her way among the undergrowth, which his great strides carried him through, taking little leaps over the briars, diving to escape the swinging branches which he dashed aside. After a time the walking became easier, for the trees were all pines, whose branches grew high, and the ground beneath was carpeted with layer upon layer of their fallen needles, slippery indeed, but pleasantly soft to weary bare feet. The sunlight was streaming into this wood, bringing out delicious gummy scents and warming all the air ; the roses began to return to Sarolta's cheeks and her blood to course less languidly. All at once, quite suddenly, they came upon a house—a very fine house, as it seemed to

her, with a tiled roof and a porch and large windows ; but what a strange thing to find such a house in the middle of a fir-wood ! The ground had been cleared for some little space about it, and there was a garden with roses and cabbages and sunflowers and beans all growing together, and from somewhere at the rear came the crowing and clucking of cocks and hens.

The huntsman turned round and pointed. He was apparently a man of few words.

“ Do you live here, sir ? ” enquired Sarolta timidly.

He nodded.

“ And your wife and children live here, too ? ”

He shook his head.

“ I am all alone.”

He walked up the little path and into the porch, where he threw down the carcase of the deer ; then, drawing a key from his pocket, opened the door and went in, beckoning to the girl to follow. They stepped straight into a kitchen with a beaten earthen floor and a large fireplace, or stove, built into the wall, such as Sarolta was accustomed to in the village. There was no fire in the grate and the place looked comfortless enough, the floor unswept, the furniture, of which there seemed to be an abundance, dusty and unkempt.

The huntsman, laying aside his game-bag, stooped before the fireplace and began to draw the charred

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logs together with slow and awkward movements. Sarolta watched him impatiently, and at last broke out :

“ Could not I do that ? I always light the fire at home.”

He straightened his tall frame and looked down at her while she swiftly and deftly lighted the fire, piling up the wood ashes behind in such a scientific manner that presently a warm glow was diffused through the room. Then, rising from her knees, she looked round.

“ Kukurutz ! ” she cried ecstatically, pointing to a great bunch of young Indian corn which hung by a nail from one of the rafters.

The big man smiled benignly.

“ Would you like kukurutz for breakfast ? I have butter here and wild-bee honey. If you put down the corn to roast I will milk the cow.”

Sarolta clapped her hands and showed all her little milk-white teeth ; she forgot about her misdemeanour and her father’s displeasure, and looked what she was, a happy, hungry child expectant of a treat.

“ Do let us have the cobs boiled ! ” she cried coaxingly ; “ they taste so much better boiled.”

“ You will want some water, then,” he returned, speaking always slowly and with a little air of benevolent amusement.

“ Yes ; where can I get some ? ”

“ Oh, I will fetch it ! ”

He took up a pail and went out and round the house, Sarolta at his heels. She gave a frightened spring aside when a large brown dog emerged from its kennel at the angle of the wall and came forward, barking good-naturedly and wagging its tail ; and then stood watching while the huntsman filled the bucket at the well. As the tapering end of the tree-trunk, to which the chain sustaining the wooden pail was attached, disappeared within the moss-grown border of the well and its broader end with the nicely adjusted weight pointed skywards, she exclaimed with awestruck admiration :

“ It is wonderful to have a well all of one’s own ! ”

He stooped over the well, jerked at the chain, and sent the tip of the fir-trunk on its upward journey before replying :

“ There are many wonderful things to be found here, little maid ; but sometimes it is very lonely.”

He carried back the water to the house and filled the big pot for her ; and Sarolta delightedly put on the kukurutz to boil ; and when he had gone forth to milk the cow she washed her face and hands in the water remaining in the pail, and then fell to work to sweep and dust the kitchen.

All looked fair and bright when he returned with a foaming can, and, moreover, a couple of eggs warm from the nest, which he set down to roast in the ashes. Sarolta had found a dish on which



she now tastefully piled the corn-cobs, all delicately golden and smoking hot, and then she pushed forward a chair and dusted it with her apron, and said :

“ Will you please to take place, sir ? ”

She dropped into her own place opposite him, responded eagerly to his invitation to help herself, and presently, holding her corn-cob in both hands, was blissfully pecking at it, her yellow head turning now this way and now that, and looking altogether rather like a canary bird at work upon an ear of millet. The huntsman was the first to break silence :

“ It is eighteen years,” he said, “ since a woman sat opposite me at table.”

“ Eighteen years ! ” exclaimed Sarolta, pausing in her pecking, and opening astonished eyes. “ I was not born then.”

“ My mother,” he continued, half absently, “ will have been dead just nineteen years at Michaelmas. That was her wheel yonder in the corner.”

Sarolta glanced towards the corner, much impressed ; she, too, could spin, but only with a distaff. But a new thought struck her.

“ And did your wife die, too ? ” she enquired.

“ I never had a wife,” he returned. “ I had a sweetheart once—she died the week before the day fixed for our wedding.”

“ Oh ! ” said Sarolta ; and she laid down her kukurutz and groaned for sympathy. And then,

after a pause, during which she had resumed her nibbling, she enquired diffidently : " Why did you not get another one ? "

" That is the question," said the huntsman, with first a sigh and then a smile ; adding after a moment : " I never saw a maiden I liked so well."

Sarolta nodded thoughtfully, then cast a critical glance round.

" But you ought to have someone to clean and dust for you," she said, " and to cook, and mend your clothes."

" I do all that for myself."

" But not very well, do you ? A man cannot do those things. Then you must be so lonely. In our village when a man's wife dies, if his daughter isn't old enough to manage things he always takes another wife directly. " I am afraid," she added, with a sudden change of tone, " now that my father has turned me out, he will want to marry somebody—our Mariska is much too young to wash and cook."

The man leaned his elbow on the table and bent forward, looking at her keenly.

" I want to know the truth of this story. Are you quite certain that you have told me the truth ? Did your father really turn you out for dancing at the inn ? "

" He had been drinking, do you see ? and that made him more inclined to be angry ; and then he

sent twice to tell me to come back, and I did not go."

"That was bad," said the man. "Were you dancing with your sweetheart, little one?"

"Oh, no," returned Sarolta. "It was Ludovic; and they say he is going to marry Anna Billinsky."

"That is a pity," said the huntsman. "If it had been your sweetheart you might have married him now that your father will not have you at home."

"But I have no sweetheart!" cried she.

"No?" he returned. "Then I'll tell you what you must do, maiden—you must marry me. When I saw you running down the forest path this morning I rubbed my eyes and thought I was dreaming, for it seemed to me that it was my Hanka coming along. She also had hair like the corn, and blue eyes and a round face—and sometimes in the early morning she used to run out without a kerchief on her head."

"And would you marry me for that?" said Sarolta.

"I think I would; and also because I am sure you are a good maiden, and would keep my house neat and clean; and because it is, as you say, very lonely here in the forest; and also because your father has turned you out."

She looked at him reflectively.

"All that is true; but are you not rather old?"

"I am not yet forty. Well, shall we go back now

and ask your father ? I do not think he will refuse to take you in until we can be married."

"Would you let me spin with that spinning-wheel ? "

"Oh, yes ; and there are beautiful things in the chest yonder—lace collars and embroidered caps, and a gold chain and two rings with stones in them."

"Oh !" said Sarolta, and clapped her hands. "Shall we go and ask my father now ? But you will not let him beat me ? "

"He shall not so much as lay the tip of his finger on you."

She looked at him with dawning admiration. He certainly was very big and strong, and that was nice ; but he had a strange dark face, and she could not help feeling a little afraid of him.

"My name is István Zinsky," he said. "I come from the mountains. Suppose you tell me your name ? "

"Sarolta Horváth. My father is Cziprian Horváth ; and we live not far from Petheöfalva church."

"Well, you shall take me there," said he.

Sarolta quickly disposed of the golden grains remaining on her cob, drank off her milk, and rose.

He took her hand, and they went out of the porch and down the little garden path and into the forest once more. Sarolta was very silent : the sight of the dead deer in the porch had made her reflective

again. The huntsman was so tall, too, and took such long steps, and those dark eyes of his had such a strange look in them ; and yet they were kind, very kind when they glanced at her. They walked quickly, and as they passed, one by one, the scenes of her last night's terrors, Sarolta shivered ; and where the brambles grew across the path the huntsman took hold of her with his strong hands, and fairly lifted her over them.

Now they were drawing near the village, and already the sounds of rustic life reached their ears—ox-drivers calling to their beasts, the shrill cry of a peasant mother summoning her youngsters to the morning meal ; now an extraordinary medley of noises—the cackling of geese, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the bleating of calves and goats, accompanied by a multitudinous rush of feet. The flocks and herds of the hamlet were being driven out to pasture ; and as the huntsman and his companion emerged from the wood they could see the cloud of dust which marked their progress. In all probability Sarolta's own little brother, Jankó, was walking behind, cracking a cart-whip and deeming himself a man. Her heart grew warm within her as she conjured up the vision of the urchin's roguish sunburnt face, and his laughing eyes peering out from under the brim of his battered hat, his brown neck and breast showing through his open shirt, his short sturdy legs swaggering

along in their fringed canvas trousers. At the mere thought of him the oppression which had sat so heavily upon her on passing through the wood was lifted ; indeed, when they emerged from beneath its shadow and found themselves once more in the familiar dusty street, it seemed to Sarolta that her experience of the night had been a dream.

Was not the life about her going on just as usual ? The children pattering to school ; the carpenter's wife at work on the plastering of her cottage just as she had been yesterday ; so engrossed indeed was she in the fanciful design that she was drawing with her forefinger on the wet wall that she did not turn her head to see Sarolta and her companion pass ; her good man was sawing as usual in his shed in the rear, and singing a hymn the while. Widow Sztának, next door, was beating hemp, surrounded by a kind of aureola of yellow dust ; Yozso and Stiefan Knotek were already at work basket-making ; the judge was smoking in his doorway ; Rosie, the innkeeper's daughter, was sweeping out the house. Some of the neighbours laughed and nodded at Sarolta, but quite good-naturedly, and Rosie called after her to know if her legs were not stiff. Was it possible—could it be possible that, after all, she was not an outcast—that people did not even know of her misdemeanour ?

István had loosed her hand, and walked a pace or two behind her ; people looked at him with some

surprise, but it did not seem to occur to any of them that he had any connection with Sarolta.

Here was home at last, and there sat little Pálo on the doorstep, a great lump of black bread in his hand, drumming meditatively with his bare feet on the cobble-stones between every bite.

Sarolta rushed at him and caught him up in her arms, rapturously kissing his dirty, chubby little face.

He curled his legs round her waist after his custom, jiggled placidly up and down in her arms, kissed her back as a kind of afterthought, and took another mouthful of bread.

"It is our Sarolta!" he called out indistinctly. "Mariska, here is our Sarolta come back!"

Mariska came running to the door, her mouth also full.

"Oh, sister, is it you? I am so glad! Are we to have potatoes or beans for dinner?"

Now a man's voice sounded from within the cottage, leisurely trolling some pious ditty.

"What, is it you, my girl?" he cried presently, interrupting himself in the middle of a stave. "Come in, come in! Why don't you come to breakfast with the rest of us?"

"You need not be afraid," whispered Mariska, with an important air, seeing that her sister hesitated, "the palinka was finished last night."

There indeed sat old Cziprian Horváth, still at

the table, his empty jar beside him, a big piece of black bread in his hand, which he waved affectionately at his daughter in token of greeting. His eyes perhaps were a trifle bloodshot, and his features more puffy than usual, but otherwise there was no sign of his recent potations, with the exception, perhaps, of a certain mental haziness. He had evidently forgotten alike his daughter's iniquities and his own threats.

As the girl approached diffidently, his expression changed from one of maudlin good-nature to amazement, and he glanced past her at the huntsman who was following in her wake.

"Praise be to Jesus Christ!" said the latter in greeting.

"In all eternity, amen," replied old Cziprian. "Is it you, István Zinsky?"

"It is indeed I, good father! I come to ask your daughter's hand in marriage."

"So, so!" exclaimed old Cziprian, hardly believing his ears.

"Yes, indeed," returned the huntsman. "It is this way. I want a wife, and your daughter tells me that you do not wish to keep her at home, therefore let us make a match of it."

Cziprian's cunning old eyes began to twinkle.

"I—not wish to keep my child at home? Why, what should I do without her? My beloved wife—ah, a saint she was!—died three years ago, and since



then I and the little ones look to Sarolta for everything. Indeed, Mr. Huntsman, it would be a very great sacrifice to part with her."

Sarolta stood by with blushing face and downcast eyes. Little Pálo had again climbed into her arms, and Mariska, drawing near, had seized her hand. The girl's heart seemed to go out to them at the mere touch of the little warm, clinging hands.

But István was speaking again.

"I know she is a treasure," he said; "but some day surely she must take a husband, and you may not find a better one than I."

"Nay; but you are so many years older than my maid," said Cziprian; "and you live so far from us all, yonder in the forest. The child would die of loneliness."

"Oh, sister, do not go and live in the forest!" whispered Mariska; "there are spirits there."

Sarolta began to tremble, and then, raising her eyes, looked quickly, first round the familiar room and then at her suitor.

The sunlight was streaming in through door and window, and gave added brightness to the walls recently whitewashed by her own hands. The humble rickety bits of furniture which she had so often waxed and polished, the pots and pans and jars which it was her pride to keep in order—each well-known object seemed to plead with her—*Don't go, Sarolta!* And there was this big, strange

man, with his dark, strong face—a little frowning now—and his black eyes. Could she go and live with him all alone in the forest? If he were angry some day he might kill her, perhaps, as he had killed the little deer.

“Oh, no, father!” she cried quickly; “I don’t want to marry!”

“You know nothing at all about it, my daughter,” he rejoined, turning upon her sharply; “you have nothing to do with it. This matter must be settled between István Zinsky and myself. It is,” he added, turning to the last-named personage, and exchanging his irascible tone for a pleading whine, “it is as I say, neighbour, a very great sacrifice for me. If I consented to give you my daughter—who is the life and soul of our home—I should be forced to ask for some compensation. My pig, good friend, died a month ago; and I have long desired a goat—a goat, Mr. Huntsman, is necessary in a family which has first been deprived of a mother and then of an elder sister.”

“A goat and a pig,” said the huntsman scornfully: “those could be easily had; but understand——”

“Nay, I have not done!” cried Horváth, his eyes twinkling ever more delightedly. “There would be also a trifle of money needed to settle my account with the black Jew. Ah, you see, when he hears I am giving my daughter in marriage he will expect it! He will say: ‘People who can

afford to marry their daughters can afford to pay their debts.' "

" Cziprian Horváth," said the huntsman, " you must understand me. I ask no dowry with the girl, but neither will I buy her. It is true I am older than she is—perhaps for that all the better able to cherish her. It is also true that I live some way from here, in the forest ; but the forest is beautiful. She would have plenty to keep her busy at my house yonder ; and if she were lonely while I am out, why, she could have that little fellow there to keep her company until God gave us little ones of our own. She would not be unhappy, I promise you. Sarolta, you and I were merry enough at breakfast this morning, were we not ? But I will not have you forced. You shall do nothing you do not like."

Sarolta's cheeks were as red as two roses, her golden lashes quivered, and her lip drooped, but she did not speak.

" Fie, what talk is this ? " cried old Cziprian indignantly. " Do nothing she doesn't like ? Heard ever any Christian the like of that ? She is a good, pious, well-brought-up girl ; she knows very well that if I were to tell her to marry the devil, it would be her duty to do it."

" Oh, Sarolta, don't marry the devil ! " cried Pálo ; and indeed both children looked askance at the big dark man,

But somehow Sarolta could not raise her eyes nor find her voice.

“ I see how it is,” said the huntsman. “ Well, do not fear, my pretty one ; I will not take you against your will.”

His tall figure came between her and the sunlight for a second, as he stepped towards the door, then he was gone. Cziprian burst into a storm of imprecations mingled with appeals to the powers above to witness the wrongs of an injured father ; and Sarolta thought of the tall man taking his lonely way with his kind face overcast—going back to the silence and desolation of his solitary home, and in a moment she shook the children from her.

István Zinsky’s long strides had not after all carried him much farther than the church, when he heard behind him the swift patter of bare feet, and, turning, saw a very rose of a maiden, all blushes even to her flaxen crown, who stretched towards him two shaking little hands, and said in a very unsteady voice, yet with a smile :

“ If you please, Mr. Huntsman, I say yes.”

## A SLAVONIAN SHYLOCK

IN honour of Lady Day, the Baroness Betty had put on her black silk dress. As a rule it emerged from her wardrobe only four times a year : at Christmas, Easter, All Saints' Day, and on the Assumption—once, perhaps, in a decade or so, it went away with its owner for a visit, and was donned when she dined out with her hostess, providing the weather was fine and the company sufficiently worthy. This dress was about thirty years old, having been presented to Betty long after the family reverses, and was made with a curious little arrangement called a pannier, and with frills and bows innumerable, The material being *gros-grain* of the richest quality, and the precautions which Baroness Betty took for its preservation being extraordinary, it seemed probable that she herself would wear out first.

To-day was Lady Day, and all the air was full of spring sunshine : Betty had returned from her devotions early, and her heart felt light ; it seemed to her that she must do further honour to this breezy, sparkling festal-day—she would wear the black silk.

She drew forth this sacred garment from its tissue paper and lavender, and put it on, glanced with a satisfied air into the silver-framed looking-glass—

one of the few relics of former luxury which still remained to her, and which looked oddly out of place on the common wooden dressing-table—smoothed her snow-white hair, fastened her lace tucker with a plain gold brooch (once upon a time a necklace of priceless pearls used on such occasions to be clasped round the throat that was now so withered), and then, when just about to leave the room, paused, with a half-sad smile.

After a hasty glance round, though she knew well that no one would disturb her at this hour—had not Minka, the servant, gone out to visit her parents, and was not Baron Charles, Betty's brother, "busy" with the newspaper?—she unlocked one of the rickety drawers in her bureau, and drew out a small box. The lid being lifted, displayed a roll of black velvet that, when unfolded, revealed an object on which Betty's eyes rested lovingly.

A key, about four inches long, a key fashioned out of pure gold, like to Bluebeard's famous key of old, but devoted to no such sinister purpose—it was, in point of fact, a Chamberlain's key—the emblem of a certain coveted office about the Emperor-King's person; a very sinecure of an office, but only bestowed on Hungarians of noble birth.

This key was not intended to fit into any lock, though at one time, indeed, its owner had hoped by means of it to find his way into a woman's heart; no, that is not the right way of putting it, for the

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heart in question was open to him already—he hoped, rather, that the possession of this key would enable him to lock out all other intruders.

More than fifty years before, when Baroness Betty was young and handsome and rich, and lived with her parents in a fine moated Schloss, where they entertained right nobly the highest in the land, a certain young neighbour had sued in vain for her hand.

Good blood ran in his veins, to be sure, but he had neither lands nor title to offer her ; as for wealth, the few thousand crowns which he received annually were barely sufficient for one.

The alliance was not to be thought of ; nevertheless, there were tears in Betty's bright eyes when she saw her wooer go, and he managed in some way to convey to her that he did not give up hope.

Some day—before very long in all probability—the King would appoint him Chamberlain. If Baroness Betty were still unmarried—and might he not hope that she would be still unmarried ?—he would present himself again ; the golden key would give weight to his proposals, and surely their mutual fidelity would claim consideration.

But the golden key did not come into his possession till long afterwards, and then, though Baroness Betty was still unmarried, he did not present himself again, for great changes had taken place in the fortunes of her house ; ruin had come to it,

ruin absolute and irretrievable. Her parents were dead—killed, it was said, by the shock and the humiliation—everything was sold. Betty and her brother Karoly had to leave the moated Schloss and hide themselves in this little mountain village where they had lived ever since on a pittance just sufficient to keep body and soul together. Betty's Chamberlain died unmarried, and bequeathed to her the golden key which was to have been for them the key of happiness. Did he not say so himself in the farewell note which he penned with his sick, tremulous hand? It lay even now beneath the key and its velvet wrapper.

*"J'avais cru que ce serait pour nous la clef du bonheur"*—so began the wavering lines that had gone straggling over paper now yellow with age. Betty did not read them—she knew them by heart—but she balanced the key a moment in her hand, and as she did so the sadness went out of her smile: after all, it was something to have had this love in her life!

Having locked away her treasure, she went rustling over the painted floors, amid furniture which she had herself waxed and polished on the previous day; the Baroness Betty did a great deal of housework, for she liked everything to be exquisitely neat and clean, and there was only one servant. She cooked very often for Karoly, or, as he preferred to be called, Charles, for French was the language of their



youth,\* and they spoke it still between themselves. Charles, then, was somewhat dainty, and liked *petits plats* very finely dressed. She also washed and got up his shirts, and did the major part of the gardening, while Charles walked up and down the narrow path and gave her the benefit of his advice.

"There are a great many weeds here, my sister," he would say, and then Betty would get up hastily from the border on which she was actually engaged, and trot across to the spot he pointed out, tucking up her worn print gown yet a little higher as she went.

"How sharp your eyes are," she would say, as she squatted down once more, and her little sunburnt hands flew hither and thither.

And then Charles would smile with a superior air, and remark that certainly a weed never did escape him, for, to be sure, he hated weeds.

Betty was very active for her seventy years, and, as she invariably rose with the lark, she managed to get through a multiplicity of employments while the day was yet young, so that her afternoons might remain free for long walks with her brother, or calls upon the sick villagers. But to-day she was going to be a fine lady.

She held her head quite high and made little mincing steps as she entered the sitting-room,

\* Until comparatively recent times French was habitually spoken by Hungarian families of distinction.

where she at once took possession of the sofa. Baron Charles, who was a small, slight man, very like her in appearance, though, except for a certain dignified and cheery determination to make the best of their fallen fortunes, unlike her in everything else, looked up approvingly from beneath his shaggy brows.

"*Que tu es belle*," he said.

Betty smiled consciously, and crossed her small, hard-worked hands upon her silken lap.

"I thought, as it was a feast-day . . ." she began.

"But certainly you have done well," he interrupted, hastening to assure her of his approval; and then fell to smoothing his own eyebrows, and examining his beautifully polished nails—he must bring himself up to the level of the black silk.

Silence fell, broken presently by a little laugh from Betty. Baron Charles looked up.

"I was thinking," said she, "of the last time I wore my beautiful dress. It was when our cousin took me to see that little Countess Linecs. You know, Charles, that rich Countess Linecs, whose grandfather they say was"—she dropped her voice—"a *Jew*!"

Charles evidently remembered, for he grimaced and shuddered.

"Her manners," pursued Betty, "you remember we said to each other afterwards that her manners were very peculiar: but then, what can you expect with a grandfather like that? Do you recollect

how she said to me : ' They tell me, Baroness, that your name is in the Almanach de Gotha ! ' " Charles raised eyes and hands to heaven.

" Yes," resumed Betty, with her quiet little laugh, " she said it to me just like that, *tout court*, at the very moment of our introduction. I was almost sorry that I put on my beautiful dress for a person of the kind."

" Oh, no," said Charles ; " that is speaking too strongly. She thought, perhaps, the poor woman, that it would please you to know that she had noticed our names in the Almanach."

" Fie," said Betty. " A thing that everyone knows ! "

Charles, having satisfied himself as to the condition of his nails, now took up his newspaper again.

" In a little while, my sister," he said, " I shall be at liberty for conversation. At present I am busy."

" Oh, *je t'en prie*, let me not disturb thee," cried she, apologetically, and once more silence fell in the quiet room.

The state apartment occupied by these two scions of nobility was about twelve feet square and formed part of a suite of equally tiny rooms, all opening one into the other, according to the custom of the country. A minute drawing-room next door, Charles's bedroom beyond, then Betty's, then the servant's ; last of all, the kitchen. The *jalousies* were already closed, so hot and strong was

the March sunshine ; its rays now came creeping in between the slats, sliding over the painted floor and climbing up the folds of Betty's treasured silk. Just as she was taking the precaution of edging beyond their reach, a loud clatter and clamour was heard in the kitchen regions, and presently Minka came whirling through the rooms, throwing open doors and upsetting furniture with absolute disregard of all rules of propriety.

Baron Charles looked up from his newspaper, and uttered the Hungarian equivalent for a big D. None of the *petits jurons familiers*, so often on his tongue, appeared to him equal to the occasion.

"Minka!" cried Betty, rising from the sofa and looking much astonished ; but Minka, heedless of the scandal she was giving, came hammering over the floor in her high Sunday boots, sobbing convulsively and wringing her hands. When near enough to her mistress she flung herself down, a forlorn creature in spite of her amazing holiday finery, at her feet. Big, round salt tears rolled down her sunburnt face and splashed on to her beautiful embroidered collar.

"Oh, mistress!" she cried. "Oh, oh, woe is me! Oh, *Pana Velkna Marzsna* (High Mighty Lady), help me!"

"Why, what is this?" said Betty, laying her hand kindly on the drooping beribboned head.

"Oh, oh!" sobbed Minka, still drowned in tears—

"the high-born lady knows my father is poor, and the crops—ah, yes, the Jew would have had all the crops if he had but waited; but he says it is not enough, and besides—oh! oh! he thinks the crops will fail this year. The snow lay so long on my father's little fields—just where my father's fields are it is flat—and when the thaw came the water did not run off, and the seed is not coming up well and the Jew says it must have rotted in the ground! And he will not wait, he will not wait!"

"H'm—h'm!" said Baron Charles.

"And now," continued Minka, with a gasp, "he wants to take everything—our house and the fields and everything! My father and mother and all the children—there are six at home younger than I—they will all, all be turned out to die, unless—unless . . ."

Here, with a burst of sobs, she hid her face in her hands; the tears dripped through her fingers, and one fell with a splash on the black silk dress.

Baroness Betty immediately wiped it off, and moved a little further away; but she spoke very kindly.

"Unless what, my child?"

"Oh, gracious lady, unless I break my promise to Jánko, and give him—the wicked Jew—all I have, all I have worked so hard for—this dress, and my four new aprons and my bridal gown, and even—even my wedding-cap—and the feather beds!"

The Baron Charles stamped with his little polished boot, and struck his forehead with a groan.

"And that is not all," pursued the girl almost inarticulately. "He says—he says I must not marry, I must remain a servant for three years more and give him all my wages—only in that way can the debt be paid, for he says he will not trust to my father any longer. Unless I agree to that he will take everything and turn my father and mother and little ones out upon the road. Dear mistress, how can I let them be turned out upon the road?"

The Baron groaned again, and mechanically began to search his pockets. They did not contain much. A pocket handkerchief, very coarse and clean, with an embroidered monogram in one corner—Betty's work; a pair of cotton gloves with fingers of somewhat peculiar shape, for they were also made by Betty; a very old pipe, and a few copper coins, the value of each being the tenth part of a penny. Baron Charles liked to have a number of these in his pocket, for he never could pass a beggar without bestowing on him some alms, just as he never could pass a child without pressing a sugar-plum into its little expectant hand. A packet of these completed the inventory of his portable possessions. And, in truth, with the exception of his hat, his stick, and a very few articles of wearing apparel, he owned no others. Betty kept the meagre purse, not indeed because the tiny stipend upon

which they lived belonged to her—which was the case—but because, as she used to say sometimes, with a little chuckle, *les messieurs* were inclined to be extravagant.

Her voice now broke in upon his abortive calculations.

“Minka, my child, this is very sad, but what can be done? You cannot refuse to help your family.”

“But there is Jánko,” wailed Minka. “He has already waited four years: I cannot expect him to wait another three. And then, if the Jew takes all I have, how can he marry me? How can anyone be a bride without clothes?”

“My good girl,” said the Baron, reviving sufficiently to be a little jocular, “it is you whom your sweetheart is marrying and not your clothes. If he has the heart of a gallant man, as I am sure he has, he will marry you in your canvas petticoat.”

Minka gazed at him for a moment, her blue eyes staring piteously from under their red, swollen lids.

“But no one ever marries a girl without clothes,” she murmured.

“*Tais-toi*,” said Betty to her brother. “*Tu sais bien que ces pauvres filles ne travaillent que pour leur dos*—just for their backs—Minka,” she continued seriously, turning to the girl, “I am afraid you will have to make the sacrifice. You cannot allow your father and mother to be turned from

their home. Jánko will wait, I am sure ; but if not—better let everything go.”

Minka burrowed her head into the unresponsive sofa-back and positively howled.

“*Tiens, tiens,*” said Charles, much moved. “Do not be so severe, my sister. You hear there a real cry of the heart. Youth,” cried Baron Charles enthusiastically, “youth comes but once after all. Do I not know it ? I also *dans le temps*——”

“Brother,” said Betty with sorrowful firmness, “youth has come to each of us once—but life is long. This child must not poison her future by doing that which may cause her ceaseless remorse. Think, have we not also known ? ”

“Ah-h-h, you tear my heart,” groaned the Baron, and he went out of the room and out of the house, and by and by smoked a ruminative and melancholy pipe in the garden.

“Minka, my dear child,” said Betty tremulously, “listen ; I will tell you a little story. I also, yes, and the Baron, too, know what it is to be driven from a home.”

Minka inarticulately signified that she had heard about that : the little mountain village was proud of numbering among its inhabitants people who had once been so very grand and great as Baron Charles and Baroness Betty ; the villagers often talked about their history with a kind of regretful complacency.



"What we suffered," said Betty, with her voice still trembling, "I can scarcely tell you, Minka. The worst of all was to see our mother suffer. Do you know, Minka, it killed her?"

Minka uplifted her tear-glazed face and nodded: she had heard people say so.

"Yes, indeed," pursued her mistress. "She always used to say when we knew that we were ruined and must give up everything, 'I shall never leave this place alive!' We thought she did not really mean it, but it was true—quite true! When the time came for us to go away from the castle she was standing in the window waiting for the carriage that was to take us, and I heard her again say to herself quite quietly, 'I shall never leave this place alive!' And then, Minka, when the sound of wheels came I saw her stagger, and had only just time to catch her in my arms. She was dead—her heart was broken! Think, child—you who love your mother——"

Minka groaned once more and burrowed in the sofa cushion, but she suddenly looked up again.

"But at least there was no Jánko," she cried piteously.

Betty smiled and did not answer for a moment; then she said gently and compassionately:

"Yes, my dear Minka, it is indeed very sad about Jánko."

A few moments later her brother saw Betty emerge

from the house clad in her everyday gown and mushroom hat.

"I am going to speak to the Jew," she said in reply to his enquiries.

Charles shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not envy you," said he.

Betty's own little nose was screwed up with an expression of extreme repugnance. But she was determined to do her best for Minka.

Her efforts were in vain. The Jew was polite, even obsequious, but firm ; he must be paid.

Betty and Charles sat down to a very melancholy meal. It was not that the *ragoût* was not cooked to perfection, while the speckled lettuce was freshness itself, but the thought of Minka's woe overshadowed what would otherwise have been a little feast.

"I have been thinking," said Betty, emerging all at once from a brown study, "if we—we ourselves could not find some way of helping the child. She has lived with us for nearly six years—yes, she was really a child when she came—she belongs, in a manner, to our family. Perhaps we might make some little personal sacrifice."

The Baron jingled the few copper pieces in his pocket, and looked at her with a moist, despondent eye.

"I am most willing, my dear ; but is there anything we can sacrifice ? "

"There is—perhaps my looking-glass—the frame, you know, is silver."

Charles rose from his chair. He looked positively majestic.

"Our mother's looking-glass, Betty!" he said. "Have you forgotten? It formed part of her wedding outfit, and you would sell it."

"No, no," cried Betty hastily, and with tears standing in her eyes, "of course I did not really mean it. Forgive me, dear brother! Perhaps," she added after a pause, "I might part with my black silk dress. I have had it many years, it is true, but it is quite good still."

Charles looked at her more in sorrow than in anger.

"I think, my dear," he said, "you should consider my feelings in some degree—we are then to retain no vestige even of civilization in our fallen state? You have often heard me say that I liked to hear the rustle of your silk dress—that the sound even cheated my fancy and brought me back to the past."

"Dear Charles, of course! *Je ne fais que des bêtises*. My head is full of nothing but that poor girl's grief. Those two young hearts, Charles—it is a pity if they must be parted."

"It is a sad world, my sister," said Charles oracularly; and then there was silence for a little space, broken at last by Betty:

"There is one small valuable in my possession which nobody ever sees but myself—a trifle of no importance to anyone."

But her lip was trembling.

"*Hein?*" said Baron Charles. "What's that?"

"You remember poor Gyúri's key—his Chamberlain's key? He left it to me, you know."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Charles. "Well, that at least is no use to anyone."

"It is just what I say," agreed Betty, still with that trembling lip.

"It would no doubt be a great act of charity," cried the Baron, warming to his subject. "She, poor girl, has certainly served us faithfully—shall we call her in and tell her at once what we are going to do? It will be pleasant to see the sunshine after the clouds. It is *she* who will be grateful to us."

"No; wait a minute," cried Betty faintly.

Charles's hand was already on the bell.

"Wait!" he cried, "and that poor Minka breaking her heart! Why should we wait when a word will give her such joy?"

"I was only thinking," said his sister, hesitatingly. "Poor Gyúri—it seems a pity—a—a kind of desecration. And he was so proud of that key."

"Yes, he might well be. He was a good fellow, but not quite of our world. I do not understand you, Betty. Did you not yourself propose to sell it?"

"Yes, of course. Ring, my brother, ring."

The imperative summons was not, however, immediately answered, and when presently Minka did appear, she brought a companion with her—a tall young fellow with a handsome woebegone face, whom she propelled rather than ushered into the room.

"It is Jánko," she said.

Jánko advanced and kissed first Betty's hand and then her brother's; then he stood looking from one to the other with piteous sea-blue eyes.

"It is like this," he said. "We have been betrothed for four years; we love each other dearly; we were to be married at Easter, and now—oh, it is breaking our hearts! We have no friends but you, noble sir and good lady."

Baron Charles threw himself back in his chair and stretched out his little legs. It was a delightful, an exquisite sensation, to be able to afford oneself the luxury of doing good.

Betty looked from one to the other of the young pair. There they stood in their vigorous youth, their superabundant vitality—they were like two young saplings, striving upwards to the sunshine—should she, a withered old stock, bar their progress? She smiled and looked at Charles: he should have the joy of announcing the good news.

And announce it he did in grandiloquent words and with right lordly condescension; and the joy

and gratitude of the lovers knew no bounds. It was his hand which they kissed most warmly, his bounty which they extolled loud and long.

Betty rubbed her little hands together and nodded cheerfully.

"You will be a good man to her, Jánko?" was all she said.

The wedding took place at Easter, and the rejoicings were on a most magnificent scale. Such feasting! There was pastry made by the Baroness's own hands, and venison which her cousin had sent to her, as well as some bottles of good red wine.

The merrymaking was kept up for three days before the peculiarly fashioned cake was placed before the guests, which announced that the end of all things had come. Not often, indeed, did Slovak hospitality hold out so long.

Betty had taken part in the feast, having previously helped the bride to dress, and having stood by at the performance of the marriage ceremonial, smiling to herself as she saw Minka feigning to weep the necessary tears prescribed by etiquette on the exchange of her bridal crown of rosemary for the matron's cap which must in future cover her abundant tresses. She knew how far real weeping was from the girl's bounding heart.

Now the guests had returned to their homes, and no further rite remained to be carried out save

the removal of Minka's dower from her father's house to that of her husband. The sound of distant chanting warned Baroness Betty in her narrow room that the final scene of the nuptial drama was in progress ; a procession of village matrons was now conveying Mrs. Minka's piled-up store of featherbeds to her future home. They were, no doubt, walking slowly behind the cart on which the bride's fortune was enthroned—the bright-coloured mass being garlanded with flowers. They were singing, too, as has been said, appropriate ditties ; the men were looking on, curious and amused ; but the maidens, according to custom, were keeping coyly out of sight. Yes, she could fancy it all.

Turning abruptly from the window, she unlocked her bureau drawer and drew out Gyúri's box. At least she could keep the box, she said to herself, and the letter was there still. That was the most precious part, after all. She lifted up the empty velvet wrapper : yes, there it was.

*" J'avais cru que ce serait la clef du bonheur . . . "*

Poor Gyúri ! His pale hand had indeed unlocked the door, but it was only a pair of blissful peasant-children who had run through into Elysium ! Though his faithful shade no doubt kept watch at other portals, Baroness Betty must linger awhile in this workaday world.

" But after all," said Betty, " it is something to have made two young things happy."

## BERTHE'S DREAM MELODY

WHEN Berthe Stranyovics laid her head on her pillow she was accustomed to fall asleep instantaneously, though some people might think the couch which she sought so eagerly not particularly conducive to slumber. The afore-mentioned pillow reached to the middle of the bed ; it would have been difficult to the uninitiated to steer clear of the centre monogram without coming in contact with the coronets which adorned the corners, and embroidery, however ornamental, is somewhat irritating to the cheek ; then the lace-edged sheet was buttoned neatly on to the down quilt, and could by no possibility be induced to "tuck in." Nevertheless, it was, as has been said, Berthe's practice to fall into a sweet and dreamless sleep the very moment she laid herself down ; and, indeed, when one comes to consider what a long and busy day that was which had just ended for her, the fact need not be wondered at. Countess Berthe was afoot almost as soon as it was light in summer, long before it was light in winter, and most of her household duties were accomplished by the hour at which an Englishwoman of the same rank would have stretched out a lazy hand to reach her morning cup of tea. To Berthe, as to most



Hungarian ladies, household duties played an important part in life. Winter and summer alike she was in her store-room soon after five o'clock, dispensing the various commodities required for the day's use—flour, butter, eggs, lard, home-made soap, and candles—everything, in fact, that each member of the establishment could reasonably prove necessity for possessing. Then to Mass in the Schloss Chapel, where the old countess was already installed ; then to breakfast—in the garden, sometimes, when it was fine enough. Breakfast did not take long to consume, consisting, as it did, for the most part of fruit and rye bread, with a cup of sour milk, or, in cold weather, strong coffee and boiled cream. Then to the linen-room—the eyes of Countess Berthe, like those of many of her countrywomen, loved better to dwell on the contents of these neat shelves than on the treasures of her jewel case. From the exquisite embroidered napery from Vienna to the coarse cloths grown and spun and woven by her own peasants, everything had its value.

The stables came next, and the farm premises, and the village, and the chapel again—why, it was dinner-time before Countess Berthe had finished her rounds.

By this hour the old countess, her mother, had got through her share of the morning's labours—interviewing the inspector, writing to the family

lawyer, conversing with the chaplain, darning, without spectacles and with the finest thread, some scarcely perceptible damage in table-cloth or pillow-case. She would be already seated at the round table in the sunny dining-room when Berthe's small figure would be descried hurrying up the path that led to the house, with dark eyes glancing and pretty face blushing and dimpling—a thousand apologies ready to fall from her lips if the dear mamma should be angry. After dinner and a little conversation the dear mamma took a nap, and Berthe sat quiet for perhaps the only time in the day. On such occasions as these a look of gravity, almost of sadness, overspread her usually gay face ; and the old chaplain, coming upon her sometimes, would sigh and shake his head, and wonder to himself if the dear child would ever forget. She was now thirty years old, and the affair of which she was doubtless thinking had taken place eleven years ago.

But Berthe's pensive looks were soon cast aside when the dear mamma awoke and had to be escorted round the woods, or driven to the forest, or sometimes merely talked to as she sat on a bench in the orchard. And then it would be tea-time, and after tea Berthe and the inspector would make another round of the estate, and the great oxen would come lumbering home, seventy or eighty yoke of them, each making his way to his own stall and falling to work straight-

way on his supper of maize leaves. Then Berthe and her mother would sit in the garden and watch the sunset over the plain, and the mountains turn from sapphire to amethyst and topaz, and back again to sapphire, and finally stand out black against a sky wherein a magnificent moon rode forth triumphantly. The two would sit hand in hand sometimes, so much absorbed in the beauty of this nightly pageant that the *major domo* had to warn them reproachfully that the supper hour was past ; and then—why, then it was bed-time.

These ladies led a very uneventful life, as may be seen. The monotony of it was broken only by an occasional visit to or from neighbours and relations, or by a day's shopping at Presburg or Tyrnau. They never went to Vienna or Buda Pesth ; they seldom drove as far as Pöstyény, though that fashionable watering-place was within easy reach ; they devoted themselves to their place, and to their people, and to each other—above all, to each other. Never was a more devoted love than that which existed between the mother and daughter ; and each was happy in her own way.

On one particular night Countess Berthe fell quickly asleep, as usual, but instead of not dreaming at all, or being merely visited by vague and chaotic visions not worth recalling, a very distinct fancy took possession of her slumbers. She imagined herself to be seated at her own piano—that beautiful Erard

which she had not touched for eleven years—and as her fingers strayed over the keys they produced a melody of so poignant a sweetness that in her dream she wept.

She woke with tears upon her face and with the melody ringing in her head. She sat up, going over and over it in her mind to fix it there. Had she been a more accomplished musician she would have taken down the notes ; but she had eschewed music for so long she had almost forgotten the rudiments of the art. Nevertheless, the strain remained—persistent, haunting, of extreme beauty, as it seemed to her. She was wide awake now, and realized that her appreciation was not merely a half-conscious impulse such as might have come to her while still under the influence of a slumber, but definite and deliberate. Had she ever heard that air before ? Had it come back to her from those far-away days of which she never spoke ; or was it an inspiration granted to her suddenly for some unknown purpose ?

Many hours did Berthe lie awake that night, almost fearing to close her eyes again lest she might lose this precious thread of melody ; but at last slumber overcame her, and she awoke only when Anna, her maid, kissed her hand in her morning salutation. Berthe rubbed sleepy eyes and remembered. Was the music gone ?

No ; it was still there, pulsing in heart and brain.

Never had she dressed so quickly, never had she

dispatched the waiting throng of domestics with so little heed to their explanations and petitions. It wanted still half an hour of Mass time when she found herself in the big drawing-room, unlocking, with trembling fingers, the piano that had been mute so long.

She opened the instrument, drew out the wadded cover which had served to preserve its sweetness through all these silent years, and took possession of the music stool. Her hands strayed over the keys as in her dream; but where was her dream melody? As her fingers, stiffened with long idleness, slowly and painfully picked out the notes, the magic strain eluded her; the sounds that she herself produced seem to drive it out of her mind.

She was weeping, not as in her dream, from exquisite emotion, but with disappointed longing, when the door leading to her mother's morning-room opened, and the old lady came hastening towards her, a loose wrapper thrown over her shoulders, the little slim feet, which had once been the toast of Hungarian dandies, thrust into slippers.

"My little angel, do I hear thee play again?" asked the countess.

"It was a dream, dear mamma," said Berthe; "a dream, and it has gone from me."

"Ah, if thou didst know what it is to me to hear music again," said the old lady, laying a slender, trembling hand upon her shoulder. "I have been

starved—starved for want of music all these years ! ”

“ I have forgotten,” said Berthe sorrowfully. “ Dear little mother, see how stiff my fingers have become ! And I am so stupid. It is there in my head, and I cannot find it on the keys.”

“ Dear heart, if thou wouldst but play again ! ” urged the mother. “ Thou wouldst soon remember. Ach, if thou wouldst only play to me sometimes it would make me so happy.”

She spoke with such yearning accents that Berthe, forgetting her own intangible trouble, looked at her in surprise.

“ My above all beloved mother,” she cried, “ I did not know thou didst long for music like that.”

“ Just to play, my little angel,” urged the countess tremulously. “ I only ask thee to play. Think, in the winter when it is too dark to read or sew, how it would make the time pass both for thee and for me.”

“ But I am so stupid, mamma,” cried Berthe, with a little laugh. “ I have an air in my head now ; it is there quite clear, and I cannot even find the notes. Thou knowest I never *played* much.”

“ No ; but that was because—thou couldst soon learn, Berthe. Let me ask our cousins Bohonitz to send thee a master from Vienna for a month or two. A few lessons would recall to thee what thou hast already learnt. It would be such an interest to thee, Berthe.”

"Perhaps," said Berthe slowly, "he could help me to find my dream melody."

So it came to pass that shortly afterwards the cousins Bohonitz dispatched a young artist from Vienna. He was studying at the great school of music there; but this was vacation time, and the classes had ceased till the autumn. He was a young man of extraordinary promise, it was said. The professor himself, usually so chary of praise, had remarked, on first hearing him: "Here is something for the platform." And now it was declared that Gáspár Tyúrek was the pupil whom he expected to make most stir in the world.

He arrived just about dinner-time on one brilliant summer's day. The ladies watched János pilot the tall, broad-shouldered figure through the long suite of rooms to the boudoir where they awaited him. Even if his name had not already announced him to be of their own nationality, one glance at his strongly-marked face would have assured them of the fact. The dark, rich colouring, the aquiline features, the lustrous eyes, the abundant hair, black as night—each characteristic of the full-blooded Magyar was there. But Berthe saw other than mere racial peculiarities in his face; there was more than ordinary vigour, more than youthful vivacity in line and expression; there was power, genius.

With a charming, gracious smile Countess Stranyovics rose and advanced to meet him; and he bowed

over her hand, and bestowed the customary kiss upon the wrinkled, taper fingers, if not with courtly grace, at least with a kind of gentle reverence very pretty to see.

In truth, the old countess was a beautiful, venerable figure. She was much taller than her daughter, and erect and slender. Her grey hair, which still retained a tint of the gold of its youth, was smoothed away under a wonderful fan-shaped cap, and the face beneath was pink and white as the face of a girl, and scarcely wrinkled; her lavender dress fell about her in trailing folds; a soft white shawl covered her shoulders. These garments exhaled a faint perfume of violets. There seemed to be about her whole person an exquisite old-world sweetness—a freshness unmarred by her seventy-five years, some of which had been stirring enough.

Like many artists, Gáspár was extremely susceptible to beauty in whatever form it presented itself; and he was so much impressed by the appearance and manners of the old countess that he bestowed at first but slight attention on her daughter. Berthe, indeed, with her small, plump figure, her simple morning dress, the big, shady hat tilted over her dark eyes, looked almost insignificant beside her.

By the time, however, that he had finished his second slice of the juicy sun-warmed melon, which was handed round immediately after the soup, he began to take note of the charm of his future pupil's



face, of the wit and piquancy which enlivened her speech, of her pretty tenderness to her mother, her gay, gracious attentions to himself. At first the conversation was all of musical matters, of Vienna, of the great professor, of concerts and operas ; but presently it became more personal. Countess Stranyovics chanced to enquire from what part of Hungary he came, and he named a district in the neighbourhood of Pesth, well known to her by repute.

" Relations of mine have a property there," she said. " I wonder if you have ever heard of them—Baron and Baroness Sztánek ? "

" To be sure," returned he very composedly ; " my uncle is one of their coachmen."

The countess was a little shocked. She hoped János had not heard ; she would not like János to think less highly of her guest ; and Támás, who was a coachman himself, was also assisting to wait. It was scarcely discreet of the young man to make such an avowal in the presence of Támás.

" Yes," pursued Herr Tyúrek, helping himself to the *gulyás*, and quite heedless of János's scandalized expression ; " yes, I am the son of a peasant. I was born upon the plains. I think it was the winds sweeping over them that first taught me music. You have no idea of the variety of sounds produced by the winds in those great spaces. I used to lie, as a little fellow, snug beneath my mother's *mentyék* and listen to them."

The countess heard him, with a gentle if somewhat strained smile. The *mentyék*, or great sheepskin cloak, was worn, in truth, only by the peasant folk. But Berthe turned to him with bright, enquiring eyes.

"A west wind, for instance," continued, Gáspár, "sighing over the bare plain is music in itself; and when a fierce blast comes shrieking down from the mountains it produces Wagnerian effects—forests groaning, swollen rivers leaping and thundering, with curious discords and harmonies; and when it hurls itself through a field of maize and makes every blade sing to itself, and the plumes whistle, and the cobs rattle—why, we have a symphony!"

He enlarged on the fancy, half in jest and half in earnest, for some time; and Berthe listened, fascinated. Was it, in truth, she wondered, some influence from without which had prompted her dream inspiration—the creaking of the trees outside her window, the swinging of a vane, some half-heard ditty sent waveringly forth by a peasant roysterer returning late from a carouse?

"I can believe that there might be music in the voices of the wind," she said; "but do you think that a sound, trivial, and unbeautiful in itself, can suggest a really fine theme?"

"Certainly," responded Gáspár, with a sudden, flashing smile that lit up his whole face. "I have known our master improvise so exquisitely that the

listeners wept, from a theme suggested by the grating of a chair on a stone floor."

János was now handing round the grapes, and Gáspár, drawing a cigarette-case from his pocket, asked and received permission to smoke. The countess presently began to nod in her chair, and Berthe, rising, conducted her to her room. On looking out presently she descried the young man standing by the margin of the little lake, which lay embowered in greenery beneath the sunlit rose-garden. He turned as she approached, and watched her at ease through half-closed eyes. He had never met anyone at all like her or her mother. While Berthe was threading her way towards him over the lush grass between the rose trees, he shot a mental glance backwards over his life, recalling the women he had hitherto known—the peasants of early boyhood; his fellow pupils of all nationalities; the fashionable folk to whom his growing fame had of late introduced him—no, none of them in the least resembled these delicate, high-bred women, with their gentle ways, their little condescensions wounding to no one because so kindly and so unconscious; their antiquated notions. They belonged to the great world, both of them; yet here, in their retired corner, the rush of modern life passed them by.

Berthe, approaching with a smile, suddenly detected a certain keenness in the young man's scrutiny, and became embarrassed. He was her

junior by several years, of peasant origin, while the bluest blood in Hungary flowed in her own veins. She was mistress of the beautiful Schloss, to which he had just arrived as a stranger and a subordinate ; yet he impressed her with a curious sense of timidity. There was a strength about his personality that was almost masterful ; then he was so clever, quick to apprehend, ready in argument. Even during their brief acquaintance she had noticed that he appeared to see all round a subject and to form a final opinion upon it in less time than it took herself to approach it.

“ When my mother has finished resting, we hope to hear you play, Herr Tyúrek,” she said. “ Till then, would it amuse you to take a little turn round the grounds ? ”

Gáspár dropped the end of his cigarette into the lake and declared himself delighted.

He had taken note of Berthe's new-found embarrassment, and she became even more interesting to him in consequence ; but by and by, when they were walking under the trees, her shyness disappeared, and she prattled gaily, while he, for his part, was more silent than usual, watching her expressive face and listening to her voice, which was so sweet and clear as to be in itself music.

Like many Hungarian landowners, Berthe's ancestors had paid special attention to the grouping of their trees ; the foliage of these was most harmoniously blended. The vivid gold of the acacias

was enhanced by the group of pines behind, and the massive trunks and wide-spreading leaves of the majestic plane-trees contrasted with the delicate growth of birch and poplar ; maple stood side by side with beech, elm overtopped arbele. On the sloping bank, which climbed upwards from the rose-garden to the terrace, baby acacias made points of light among the evergreens, while here and there a beautiful hibiscus stood out gay with its clusters of lilac or white. Berthe and Gáspár stood for a short time under a great plane tree, the branches of which nearly swept the ground, looking up through the golden green at the cloudless sky, and idly watching the little winged seeds that came floating forth from the clustering pods.

The sound of a shrill, sweet child's voice made them both start. From amid a tangle of greenery by the lake a little girl emerged, waving a long wand, and singing at the top of her voice, as she drove a flock of white ducks towards the water.

"I have done such work often," said Gáspár, speaking for the first time for several minutes. "I might be working now at the plough or on the threshing floor ; yet here I stand, side by side with you, Countess Berthe."

"On equal terms," his tone seemed to suggest, though he did not speak the words. Berthe raised her little head with an impulse of haughtiness, but in a moment she smiled :

"Your music will lift you to greater heights than that, Herr Tyúrek."

"You have not heard my music yet," said he quickly.

"I know that it has made you what you are," returned she, with a touch of condescension which at once amused and charmed him.

"And that is——?"

"Something very different from yonder little girl."

They went on again after this, through the gardens, and past the *major* or labourers' quarters, and back by the entrance to the village, at which point their progress was barred by a score of brown-faced, bare-legged, Slovak children, who rushed headlong to kiss the gracious lady's hand. Gáspár watched her as she stood patting the dusty flaxen heads, and patiently extending her pretty plump hand, to be first tapped upon the palm by small eager fingers, and then kissed upon the back by little mouths that were always fervent, and sometimes sticky into the bargain. She spoke to them in Slavonian, laughed occasionally, reproved gently when a too impetuous baby courtier rolled a brother in the dust. She might have been called a little queen if she had not looked even more like a little mother. When the last imp had paid his homage, Berthe and Gáspár turned their steps towards the Schloss; and by that time the countess was awake and awaiting them

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in the big cool drawing-room, with its parquet floor and brocade hangings—the pot-pourri, made yearly according to the old lady's directions from a famous recipe which had been in her family for generations, permeating every corner with its faint, suggestive sweetness.

Gáspár seated himself at the piano, which had been tuned in honour of his advent, shook back his dark locks, and played a few chords by way of prelude. The old lady, with a sigh of satisfaction, folded her hands upon her lap. Berthe sank into a chair a little behind the musician. Then he began to play in earnest.

In after years Gáspár Tyúrek came to be recognized as one of the musical forces of the world ; and even at that early stage of his career his extraordinary power made itself instantaneously felt. The heart-strings of the listeners seemed to vibrate in unison with the sounds which his strong supple fingers drew from the keys.

“ How can we thank you enough ? ” cried Countess Stranyovics when she had exhausted herself in praise. “ Berthe, here is one who will indeed be a help to thee.”

But Berthe made no answer ; she was standing with her back to them, and with one hand raised to her face.

“ She is *ganz gerührt*,” said her mother ; “ the old have fewer tears. Ah, hearts grow hard with age,

but for all that you have stirred mine to-day, Herr Tyúrek. Here is one, I say, my child, who will help thee with ease to discover that of which thou art in search. My daughter had a special motive," she added, turning again to Gáspár, "for wishing to enlist your help—hadst thou not, Berthe?"

Berthe looked round with suspiciously bright eyes.

"Dear mamma, let us not speak of that now. Will not Herr Tyúrek play again?"

Next morning, while Countess Stranyovics was darning her house linen in the big airy chamber adjoining the linen room, Berthe took her first music lesson.

"I must tell you, to begin with," she said, "that I have not touched the piano for eleven years."

Gáspár had been sorting a pile of music that lay on the instrument, and now turned round with an astonished face.

"In the name of heaven, why, Countess Berthe?"

She flushed and drew herself up involuntarily.

"I cannot tell you why," she returned; and then, immediately altering her tone: "Well, to continue; in the second place, my fingers are as stiff as matches."

"Naturally!" said he.

"In the third place, I have never played much; at the best of times I was an indifferent pianist."

"So?" returned he. "Well, now *I* will tell you a few things."



And thereupon he began, with infinite pains and patience, to explain to her how to hold her hands upon the piano ; how to play certain scales and exercises ; how, in fact, to apply herself to the rudiments of the art which she sought to acquire, in accordance with the new method. She forgot her nervousness as the lesson proceeded ; he was so interesting, so clear, so much in earnest.

Suddenly he threw himself back in his chair, remarking : " I have given you a certain amount of information ; it is my turn to ask for some. May I enquire, Countess Berthe, why, since you have neglected your musical studies for so long a time, since, according to your own account, you were never very proficient, you should all at once desire to resume them ? "

" There are several reasons," said Berthe, laughing. " I fear I must again quote one, two and three. Number one—I have always been passionately fond of music."

" That goes without saying," returned he. " Are you not a Magyar ? Nevertheless, it explains nothing."

" Number two," went on Berthe, colouring and speaking quickly ; " number two—my mother wishes it."

Gáspár bowed, but appeared unconvinced.

" Number three," began Berthe, and then she stopped.

"Now we come to the real reason," said he.

But Berthe remained silent. It seemed to her very difficult to talk about her dream to this clever young man, who had seen so much and heard so much, and whose keen eyes were fixed upon her face with an almost quizzical expression.

"I don't think you would understand," she faltered slowly.

"Try me," he pleaded in a low voice ; then, as once more she shook her head, his whole face changed; his gaze became earnest, compelling.

"I think you must tell me," he said.

Berthe yielded to the stronger will. Half-falteringly at first, then with growing enthusiasm she related her dream.

He plied her with questions, and soon became as eager as she.

"Can you not give me some idea of it ? " he asked excitedly. "Since you hear it inwardly so distinctly even now, surely you can at least indicate it."

Berthe laid her fingers on the keys, struck one note and then another, and snatched her hands away.

"I cannot—I cannot ! "

"Do not be childish," he cried impatiently. "Think a moment—now try."

"Oh, no ! " she exclaimed, jumping up, almost in tears ; "the first note I strike drives it away."

Gáspár laid his hand upon her shoulder ; his eyes were ablaze, his face pale.



"Sit down," he commanded; "sit down and try again."

Berthe, dominated in spite of herself, and so much agitated that she scarcely knew what she did, sat down once more and touched the keys; then her hands dropped, and she suddenly began to sing. Her voice, a soprano of rare quality, sweet and clear and strong, without the faintest hint of harshness, rang out with startling effect; it took Gáspár completely by surprise; but before he had time to recover from his bewilderment the strain ceased as abruptly as it had begun.

"Who could have believed," he cried, "that you could sing like that? What a voice! Dear heaven, what a voice!"

She started up, raising her hands to her head.

"Is it possible that I have sung?" she stammered. "My God! I did not know what I was doing."

"You have mistaken your vocation, Countess Berthe," exclaimed Gáspár, beside himself with artistic delight; "you must not waste time at the piano. Your voice would make the fortune of a *prima donna*; and surely it is already well trained. You must sing—you must only sing."

"Oh, no, no!" returned she, in deep agitation; "I did not mean to sing. I will never sing again, never—never. I beg of you not to ask me why; I beg of you not to tell my mother that you have heard me—not to allude to this again."

She hurried towards the door, but, when half-way across the room, turned and came back. Her face was very pale, and her lips still quivered, but her eyes were eager.

"What I sang to you—by mistake," she said tremulously, "was the music I heard in my dream. Could you remember it—could you reproduce it?"

The intensity of her desire seemed to compel response; he was, for the moment, dominated, as she had been a little time before. He went to the piano, and presently the melody came forth, if not with the magic of her dream, at least with something of its wild beauty, its penetrating sweetness.

"You have succeeded!" she cried, and clapped her hands together, her face all rosy with sudden joy. "It is there—it is there! Oh, how shall I thank you!"

Like one in a trance he played on, his face rapt, his dilated eyes fixed on her. New wondrous harmonies were heard, subtle changes; the music seemed to become every moment more majestic, more suggestive; yet the dream *motif* made itself felt through all.

Countess Stranyovics, having finished her task, came hurrying in presently from the adjoining boudoir, and found the two absorbed, ecstatic, oblivious, it would seem, of all sublunary things. Her daughter started at her touch like a sleep-

walker suddenly awakened. In a moment, however, she recollected herself, and fell upon the old lady's neck, weeping for pure gladness.

"Listen, listen! He has found it! He has found my dream melody!"

Countess Stranyovics listened, and wept too. These Magyar women have emotional natures, and, in spite of her previous declaration that tears were rare with her, in moments of agitation they came readily enough.

Presently she approached the piano where the young man still sat caressing the keys in gentlest *pianissimo*.

"Is it not strange," she said, "that my daughter should have had so beautiful a dream? Had you ever heard anything like this air before?"

"Never!" said he; and he looked at Countess Berthe.

"But is it not surprising," she continued, turning to her daughter, "that Herr Tyúrek should have been able to put it into shape? How clever he must be, *nicht!*"

"Yes, indeed," answered Berthe with a troubled look; "it is more his than mine now."

"No, no; it is yours—all yours," he cried eagerly; and then he rose from the piano, and said in a voice too low to be heard by the old lady:

"I, for one, am not surprised that this inspiration should have come to you; you are in touch with

everything that is sweet and harmonious and beautiful."

The inevitable was rapidly coming to pass. Given a young man at the most impressionable age, possessed of an artistic temperament and a vivid imagination, throw him into daily, almost hourly, contact with a particularly charming and lovable woman, amid surroundings romantic and almost unique, add a mystery intimately connected with a past of which she never speaks, and the conclusion is foregone.

Gáspár did not attempt to struggle against his destiny, though at first he was prudent enough to drop no hint of his ever-growing ardour. He would not allow his case to be desperate. Not only was he hopeful, but convinced of ultimate success. Never in all his vigorous life had he been baulked in anything on which he had set his heart. Already he had been transformed from an ignorant peasant into an educated gentleman ; from a strolling player in a gipsy band to a finished artist. Fame awaited him in the near future ; the consciousness of his own powers seemed to promise the attainment of any goal he chose to reach ; the Countess Berthe herself had, during their brief intercourse, yielded to his wishes on all points save one. One day he would solve the mystery and do away with the ill-judged resolution which forbade her to sing. She should sing for him if for no one else. Already the memory

of her voice, though only once heard, inspired him to achievements such as he had not hitherto accomplished. He played with ever-increasing mastery of his instrument ; he improvised after a fashion that would have astonished those who knew him best ; he worked out a finished composition from Countess Berthe's dream which filled her with gratitude and delight.

Meanwhile her musical education proceeded apace. She was docile, intelligent, and possessed of an essentially musical temperament. Under Gáspár's energetic tuition her progress was such as to astonish both herself and her mother.

At length, however, the eve of his departure came. The professor had returned to Vienna ; the classes were to be resumed. This was to be Tyúrek's last term, and he must not waste a day of it.

When Berthe had finished her lesson, she turned round upon her chair and began, in rather quavering tones, to thank her master for the trouble he had taken with her ; but all at once something in his face made the words die upon her lips.

" Yes," said Tyúrek ; and leaning forward he suddenly took possession of both her hands. " Yes, I love you, Berthe. I will say it—I must say it before I go."

She drew away her hands, looking startled but not angry, and gently shook her head.

" I know there are a thousand obstacles," said

Gáspár vehemently, " but I will break them down—I will sweep them away. My love is too great to be withstood—you will marry me, Countess Berthe."

Again she shook her head :

" There is one barrier that can never be swept away."

And then suddenly she began to laugh, a laugh with a hint of tears in it :

" Why, you foolish boy, I am five or six years older than you."

" Five or six years !" he echoed. " If it were twenty years what would it matter ? One does not count life by years."

" And do you think," she continued, still playfully, " that my mother would consent to part from me ? "

" I would wait," he said. " The time will come, Berthe, when you will be alone in the world, and then you may be glad to turn to one who loves you."

Her face clouded over, and she was silent.

" Does this insurmountable difficulty," he cried, with bitter emphasis, " come from the difference in our rank ? I am a son of the people—of the lowest among the people—and you——"

" There is no question of these things," she interrupted hastily. " Genius is a leveller of all such distinctions——"

" Yes," he broke out, interrupting her in his turn, " you think perhaps you would stoop to me, but



I tell you I should raise you. With you at my side there is no greatness I could not achieve."

"Alas," said she, "it can never be! My dear master, you must become great without me."

She was trying to speak lightly again, but he would have none of it. His face was pale and drawn, his voice harsh.

"What lies between us, then?" he asked brokenly. "What is it that keeps us apart? You shall tell me; I have a right to know."

Berthe hesitated for a moment, and then, seeing him deadly earnest, yielded to a generous impulse. She unfastened the little jewelled watch that was pinned to the bosom of her dress, and, touching the spring, sent the lid flying open. Within, crisply curled upon its shining surface, lay a short lock of dark hair.

"I understand," said Gáspár in a low voice; "I have done."

Leaving her side he took a turn about the room, and then paused opposite to her.

"Is it on account of—of *him* that you will never sing?"

"It was because of my singing that he died," she said. "The man who killed him made a wager with another that I would sing a certain revolutionary song if he asked me. I knew nothing of the bet, and, being but a girl, young and foolish, complied, thinking no harm; but he"—glancing down—

wards at the closed watch—"he imagined I had been insulted, and he challenged the other and fell. And then I vowed that never while I lived would I sing another note."

"You did wrong," cried Gáspár ; "you who loved him should have dedicated the best you have to the thought of him. His memory should have inspired you ; you should have sent your voice ringing through the world in his honour. This is what my love shall do for you, Berthe—do you think I shall cease to love you because we are to spend our lives apart. Wherever I go I take the thought of you with me ; to whatever heights I may climb, there shall you be enthroned beside me ; through all my music I shall listen to the inspiration of your dream."

And so Gáspár Tyúrek went out into the world with a strong heart if a sad one. As the valour of a knight of old was increased by the knowledge that he bore his lady's colours, so was Gáspár spurred on to do great deeds in honour of her whose sweet memory he carried deep in his inmost soul. All through the years he seemed to hear her singing, and he never failed to draw fresh inspiration from that voice which she had vowed should be for ever mute. Thus the two sorrowful loves were linked together by the golden notes of Countess Berthe's dream melody ; and her very silence gave music to the world.

## PISTA'S SHIRT-SLEEVES

PISTA stood in the midst of his companions outside the church door—a fine specimen of a vigorous Slovak stripling. His round hat was rakishly poised on his crisp, sunny locks ; it was a very magnificent hat, adorned not only with the three ostrich feathers to purchase which a village dandy will often sacrifice a year's wages, but with geraniums purloined from the Schloss garden, with artificial flowers of a kind unknown to horticulturists, and with tinsel ribbons which glittered bravely in the glaring Hungarian sunshine. Very smart altogether did Pista look this Sunday morning, from the tips of the plumes aforesaid to the soles of his high, polished boots ; his braided cloth breeches were so much padded that his nether limbs looked like bolsters, his waistcoat was gaily embroidered with scarlet and gold, while the sleeves of the fine linen shirt beneath were so completely covered with fanciful designs that hardly an inch of the original fabric was visible. Pista's bronzed features were finely cut, the racial peculiarities striking the observer : here were the thin nostril, the delicate curved lip, the oval face ; his eyes, blue as his own Carpathians as seen from this distance, wandered

hither and thither contentedly, as he stood interchanging jests with his comrades and negligently puffing at a cigarette.

Through the open door came the apparently interminable verses of the closing hymn, lustily sung by the more devout portion of the congregation ; the younger men had, according to their custom, rushed into the open air as soon as the priest had left the altar, for the service was really at an end, and this final act of piety was a work of supererogation. A work undertaken nevertheless *con amore*, for in the Slav peasant hymn-singing becomes a perfect passion ; whether sallying forth at dewy dawn, or returning homewards late at night (alas ! too often from the village inn) a hymn heralds his advent.

At last the monotonous and somewhat nasal ditty came to an end, and the congregation poured forth ; the elders of the village first, from their benches nearest the door, old men soberly clad, with sleeved coats and hats with down-bent brims sheltering locks cut square just at the nape of the neck. Then came the married women—more gaily attired these, with a wealth of skirts accumulated during a lifetime, and beautifully embroidered caps and bodices ; the maidens next, their characteristic headgear of many-folded scarlet ribbons hiding their painfully screwed-away flaxen locks, their aprons and bodices and closely pleated skirts

bearing testimony alike to their artistic taste and their clever fingers ; and finally the children, copies in miniature of the older folk. The scene, so quiet a little while before save for the crowd of young men, became all at once extraordinarily animated ; amid a babel of voices and laughter the groups broke up and melted away, presently vanishing under the painted lintels of the gay little thatched houses. A girl, strutting somewhat pompously down the middle of the road, was all at once accosted by Pista.

" *Pochvalen buď Jézus Kristus* " (Praise be to Jesus Christ), he said, saluting her after the custom of the place.

" *Navéchi* " (in all eternity), returned she, proceeding to make some remark about the weather.

But Pista's eyes were fixed on her embroidered bodice, the wide cambric sleeves of which were wonderfully wrought in fine blue silk.

" Ah ! " he cried enviously, and stretching forth his hand he fingered the pattern diffidently. " Ah ! how beautiful ! Never have I seen sleeves of such a colour. You bought them in Tyrnau, perhaps ? "

" No," returned Anna proudly, " I worked them myself. The holy ladies at the convent showed me the pattern, and sent for the silk for me all the way from Pózsony."

Another girl who had come up behind them now

stepped forward. "I do not like the colour," she said sharply.

She was a tall, handsome creature, as great a contrast to Pista, with his blond beauty, as to good-natured, ill-favoured Anna, the village heiress, whose figure looked all the clumsier for its multitudinous petticoats, and whose florid flat-featured face was supported on a throat already disfigured by an incipient goitre. Marinka had gipsy blood in her veins, as was testified by her brunette colouring and flashing dark eyes. Her status in life was denoted by the absence of the scarlet ribbons, which are the pride of the more well-to-do peasant maiden, her warmly toned face and the rebellious black locks that refused to be coaxed away in orthodox fashion being sheltered by a bright yellow handkerchief, the folds closely pinned beneath her round chin and the fringed ends loosely knotted on her bosom.

"I don't like blue," she repeated, with a tap of her high boot which sent a little cloud of dust flying upwards. Pista turned pettishly from her to Anna, who had remained stolidly smiling.

"They are beautiful sleeves," he repeated; "I would give all I possess in the world to have such a pair."

"Why," said Anna politely, "they are not more beautiful than your own, Pista. Marinka is a better needlewoman than I."

■

Nevertheless, turning about her stout arm, she surveyed her own handiwork with complacency.

“Marinka’s work is also beautiful, but it is not blue,” said Pista mournfully. “I wish it had been blue.”

Marinka’s eyes filled with angry tears ; how proud she had been when her lover had brought her that piece of fine linen to embroider for him ! The crimson and yellow thread she had used was of her own spinning and dyeing ; the pattern of her own design ; she had worked late and early, robbing herself of her hardly-won rest to complete a task in which she had nevertheless taken delight ; and now Pista was already discontented with her labour. She stamped her foot again, and turned away.

When the Lady of the Schloss and her friends were sipping their coffee under the plane trees that afternoon, a dazzling figure suddenly appeared on the sunny path a few paces away from them.

“This is some messenger,” said the Lady. “No, I believe it is one of my ox-drivers—it is Pista, is it not ? ”

The youth stepped forward, and stooping with the gesture of a prince, raised his mistress’s hand to his lips.

“Why, what is wrong, Pista ? ” said she, kindly. Then with gathering alarm : “There is nothing the matter with Czigány, I hope ? ” (Czigány was the gentle beast which nightly ate bread from her hand.)

"Nay, Gracious Lady," returned Pista, standing before her very upright, with his beflowered hat in his hands. "Nay—it is only that I came to ask a favour—I came to beg the Gracious Lady——"

"Again!" cried she, uplifting a warning finger. "Did I not tell you last time, Pista, that you must give up begging?"

Pista drew himself up with, if possible, additional dignity. "I am but asking, Gracious Lady—not begging."

Her eyes rested for a moment on the two beautiful double geraniums in his hat—doubtless they had been rifled from beneath her very windows—but she sighed resignedly. "Well?" said she.

"If the High Mighty Lady could spare me some blue silk," pleaded Pista, fixing upon her his imploring eyes, "blue silk to work with, the Noble Lady understands. She can see for herself how common is the embroidery on my sleeves—only rough linen thread spun from our own flax and dyed with our own herbs—not fit to wear on Sunday, much less on a Feast day; and the high, well-born Lady knows that the great Feast will soon be here, when everyone in the whole country will be going in procession to Szanta Marinka Kosztol, the blessed chapel in the hills. Everyone will wear their finest clothes—one sees sleeves there, Noble Mistress, that are all gold embroidery from shoulder to wrist! Yes, indeed, and worn by less worthy fellows than I."



"But those are beautiful sleeves, Pista, that you are wearing there; and a little bird told me they were worked for you by a pretty maiden."

"Ah, yes," he returned indifferently, "but they are red, the Gracious Lady sees, and the Holy Mother's colour is blue, as everyone knows; and then they are worked in common thread."

"And do you think, Pista, that the Blessed Virgin has a preference for silk? No, no; you are a very vain young man, and even if I had blue silk in my possession at this moment I should not give it to you. Go away, and try to think a little less of your appearance."

Pista stooped and kissed her hand again with the same swift grace as before, but with a lowering brow; replaced his hat at the usual artistic angle, and walked away with the lightness and perfect balance only to be attained by those who habitually go barefoot.

Hostess and guests looked after him admiringly.

"He is certainly a handsome fellow," said one; adding weakly, "Could not somebody have discovered some blue silk?"

"He is, as you say, handsome," said the Châtelaine severely, "the prettiest boy on the estate; but he is really too vain—and he should not steal my flowers."

. . . . .

The little village lay simmering in the noonday heat next day, when old Widow Martha made her

way through the dust and glare to the convent door. It was wide open, according to custom during school hours, and Martha walked straight in, not only along the passage, but into the little kitchen beyond.

Sister Monica, who was peeling potatoes at the deal table, looked up in mild surprise and uttered the usual greeting.

"*Navêchi, Amen,*" answered Martha, and lifting up the corner of her apron, she incontinently began to cry.

Sister Monica was less disturbed than might have been expected, for among the good Slavonian folk, as elsewhere, tears not infrequently herald a petition ; she observed, moreover, that under one arm Martha carried a large and apparently very fat goose. Now this goose was celebrated in the whole neighbourhood. It was called Ludovica, after the Lady of the Schloss—a somewhat doubtful compliment, as some people might fancy ; but such little attentions were usual in that part of the world, and the Châtelaine accepted them for what they were worth. A bushel of beans in the present instance was deemed a suitable acknowledgment of the tribute. Ludovica had proved valuable to her owner in more ways than one ; for not only did she lay eggs of abnormal size and quality, and submit protestingly to be deprived at certain seasons of a quantity of down hitherto undreamt of in Petheöfalva, but being well-known to be Martha's only available asset, she was made,

as it were, a party to all her particularly successful bargains. Whenever, for instance, the widow wished to obtain a supply of early potatoes from the Lady of the Schloss, she invariably offered Ludovica in exchange: the Judge had parted recently with several bundles of hemp on the understanding that he was to be repaid next year, and Ludovica went security. But it was noticeable that Martha had never imported the name of that distinguished fowl into any contracts that were likely to be rigidly adhered to, and that the village Jew in particular had no rights over so much as a feather of her.

After glancing at the goose, therefore, Sister Monica at once understood the position of affairs, and offered, somewhat unwillingly, to summon Reverend Mother, who, on arriving, was greeted by the petitioner with a fresh burst of tears and imploring kissings of the hand

"Well, well," said Reverend Mother, "what is it, Martha? Potatoes? We have not too many for ourselves."

"No, good Mother. Great Heavens—no, not potatoes! It is my boy, Pista—the best son, dear Mother, that ever a woman had. Such a good boy, and so pious! Ah, but that is it! He is doubtless too good for this world, and the Lord is about to take him away from his widowed mother."

"No; but is he so truly ill?" cried Reverend Mother with real concern, while Sister Monica

dropped her knife with an exclamation of sympathy. Even the goose, extending its long neck, uttered a loud and apparently dolorous cackle.

"He neither eats nor sleeps," wailed Martha, inarticulately. "He is breaking his heart—ah, yes, a mother's eyes can see it—and it is all because of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin." She paused to sob afresh.

The little nuns looked at each other in astonishment.

"Ach, but it is true!" continued Martha, hitching up the goose a little higher under one arm, and peering cunningly at her listeners from beneath the folds of her apron. "You understand, my Sisters, it is thus: the eighth of September is a great Feast, is it not? There is to be a procession in honour of the Holy Virgin, and Pista will carry the cross, and he is breaking his heart because he cannot wear her colour. The Blessed Virgin's colour, as the good Sisters know, is blue, and Pista's sleeves, Reverend Mother and dear Sister, are embroidered with red."

"But that matters nothing," cried the guileless nuns both together, much touched and interested. "The Good God sees the heart, Martha, and does not concern Himself about the raiment. The Blessed Mother is no doubt pleased when our young girls endeavour to do her honour by wearing white veils on her Feast-days, because, do you see, Martha,

it makes them think of her and remember that they must do nothing to disgrace her livery. But when they cannot afford to buy white veils—why, then she accepts the intention. You must tell Pista that it is——”

“ But,” interrupted Martha, “ my Pista has heard that the dear Sisters have blue embroidery silk here in the Convent, and he has sent me to ask for some, that when the Feast-day comes, he may have a pair of blue-flowered sleeves like Anna, the Judge’s daughter.”

“ Pista is mistaken,” said the Reverend Mother, a little coldly ; “ we have no silks here in the Convent except those which are supplied to us for Church work. We cannot give them away. Anna, the Judge’s daughter, ordered some through us and paid for it.”

Martha threw up her eyes. Heaven was her witness that she also would pay for it—had she not brought Ludovica ?

But Reverend Mother was obdurate—she knew Ludovica.

Thereupon ensued such lamentations as had never before been heard within those quiet walls. Sister Agnes came hastening in from the garden with her arms full of newly-cut cabbages. Sister Magdalen, the delicate nun who had been sent all the way from Buda Pesth, to pick up a little strength in the sweet country air, crept painfully in from the

community-room. Sister Agatha, deeming that the house must be on fire at least, left even her kindergarten to enquire into the cause of the outcry. And meanwhile it would be difficult to say which shrieked the louder, Martha or her goose.

At last, suddenly regaining composure, the old woman pointed tragically to the coloured walls.

"Look around you, good Sisters; are not your walls blue? See the tiles—blue and white! Your china, blue! Your very pots and pans, blue enamel! And why—is it not in honour of the Blessed Virgin?"

The Reverend Mother smiled. "It was indeed the pretty and pious fancy of the good Mistress of Petheöfalva to arrange it so," she said. "It was her wish that everything which she appointed for our use should be blue—the Blessed Virgin's colour——"

"And you would deny my Pista a little bit of blue silk for a pair of sleeves," cried Martha indignantly.

The gentle little nuns looked at each other doubtfully. Even long residence amongst a Slav population had not taught them its subtleties, its extraordinary combination of genuine piety, artless vanity, simplicity and guile. This question of Pista's aspirations nonplussed them for the moment. Sister Magdalen began to talk hurriedly to her Superior in German, a language not understood by Martha. There was some blue silk which a friend

had given Sister Magdalen, and with which she had meant to embroider an altar-cloth, but the Herr Pfarrer, as the Mother would doubtless remember, had expressed a preference for red as being more of a Church colour. The silk was lying by upstairs, and if the Mother would give permission, it seemed a pity that the poor young man should not be able to gratify so praiseworthy a wish.

And so, after all, old Martha carried the day, and, after many transparently disingenuous offerings of Ludovica, went away happy, blessings on her lips, the treasured little packet in her bosom.

. . . . .

Sunset on the wide plain ; exquisite tints of rose and amber over the vast expanse that stretched away to meet the marvellous mountains—mountains which at this hour seemed to be carved out of some gigantic precious stone ; an ethereal radiance, nevertheless, in jagged peak and precipitous side forbidding the comparison with anything so tangible.

How is it possible to describe the charm of these great plains at this mystic hour ! White-clad figures were dotted about amid the russet and emerald and gold of fallow and mead and stubble ; a long line of ploughs moved slowly in solemn procession against the horizon, each drawn by a team of oxen, snowy or tawny ; waggons were crossing the rustic bridges, little bands of harvesters wending their way

homewards, scythe on shoulder ; yet the whole scene breathed of unspeakable loneliness.

Nowhere, perhaps, are so many contradictions and apparent incongruities to be found as here, in this valley of the Waag. The very spirit of primeval nature broods over this vast tract, jealous, untameable, even as the people who inhabit it—a people naturally artistic, responsive, apparently, to the march of civilization, to the ennobling and softening influence of religion, yet ever retaining certain instincts of elemental savagery.

There was a good deal of the young savage latent in Pista Knótek as he swung along in the wake of his oxen, which he had recently unyoked, and which he was now driving homewards—Czigány, the handsomest beast in the Gracious Lady's stalls, and Gúnar, his companion. The great, mild creatures moved heavily, keeping exact step, their milk-white flanks flaming in the sunset, their heads surmounted by horns which measured six feet from tip to tip, swaying slowly from side to side. Pista, walking leisurely behind, and looking very cool and fresh as his loose canvas working-clothes flapped in the breeze, carolled aloud for pure blitheness, and thought of the blue sleeves which he was so soon to possess.

I have likened him to a young savage, for of a truth this delight in bright colours, in unusual finery, is typical of the wild man. Indeed, as Pista



fondly dreamt of his future glories, of the jealousy of his fellows and the admiration of the village maidens, the vanity which swelled his heart was such as is common enough even in a lower order of creation. Have we not all seen the male bird pranking it among its kind, innocently proud of its enamelled plumage? Is there no coquetry in the stately poise of the stag's antlered head, no triumphant consciousness of beauty as well as of vigour in the carriage of the young steer as he paces round the pasture of which he is monarch? To Pista it seemed that everything about him was in accordance with his mood; everything reminded him of his blue sleeves. The lambent sky, the equally luminous hills, the drifts of fragile flowers crushed beneath his active feet, the flocks of tiny moths which fluttered at every step out of the wayside grasses—all were blue, blue as those wondrous flowers and ornaments which were so soon to grow on the fair linen beneath Marinka's clever fingers.

He knew where to find Marinka; only that morning he had passed her in her father's barn, where a heavy task awaited her—no less a one than that of threshing the piled-up store of barley which it contained. There would be no one to help her but her little brother Marzi and her old grandmother Zouzska, and her labour must of necessity endure from dawn to dusk. She would certainly be working still. Yes, as he drew near the village, he could

even distinguish the *thud, thud, thud* of the three flails as they fell in rhythmical succession.

By and by he came in sight of the small thatched shed where she was at work, and could identify the figures within: old Zouzska, recognizable chiefly by her long and skinny arms, which the loose sleeves cruelly revealed with each uplifting of the flail; had it not been for this, indeed, her figure, seen from the rear, could scarcely have been distinguished from that of her granddaughter, for it was slender and graceful still and upright as a dart, in spite of its seventy years. Marzi, with his bare feet planted wide apart and his curly locks on end, wielded his flail with right goodwill; but Marinka worked more languidly, turning every now and then towards the open doorway, and gazing out across the plain during the necessary pause entailed by the turning over of the half-beaten straw upon the threshing-floor.

During one of these pauses she caught sight of Pista, who signalled to her as soon as he saw that she was aware of his approach.

Immediately she stepped out from the shadow of the barn and walked to meet him, the silhouette of her form in its homespun garb catching the ruddy glow, so that it seemed to be outlined in fire; as she moved, the dust of the corn with which she was powdered flew off from her garments—a multitude of glittering motes. There was a glitter in her

eyes, too, which was perhaps not so pleasant to see.

“What do you want with me?” she enquired sullenly, pausing a few paces away from him.

Pista was standing by his beasts, one arm flung negligently across Czigány’s massive neck, his figure turned a little away from the girl. As she spoke he glanced round at her over his shoulder, but without otherwise moving; his face was irradiated by a pleasant smile.

“I have got the blue silk, Marinka,” he said.

“Ah,” returned Marinka. Her eyes seemed to blaze beneath her yellow kerchief, and she swung her flail backwards and forwards with fierce impetuous movements.

“*Ana*” (yes), returned he negligently. “I have got it, and my mother has still kept a piece of that linen—you remember, the linen out of which you made those other sleeves?—she has got a fine piece left. I should like the same pattern as before, but the stitches might be finer. You must use a smaller needle.”

“I!” exclaimed Marinka, flinging her flail upon the ground. “Do you think that I am going to work any more for you, Pista Knótek? No, never another stitch! Never, never again will I take needle in hand for you, Pista Knótek; do you hear? You ungrateful, hard-hearted villain! You think I am your slave, do you? You think I shall be

contented all my life to toil for you without a word of thanks. You think I will submit to be mocked at and scorned, my best work despised ; and then, because you hold up your finger——”

She broke off, choking. Pista took his arm from Czigány's neck and turned quite round ; he was very much scandalized. Never in the annals of Petheöfalva had a woman been known to adopt such a tone to a man, particularly when that man was her acknowledged sweetheart, and intended in course of time to become her husband. He eyed the recreant damsel severely ; nevertheless his tone, when he spoke, had in it as much wounded feeling as anger.

“ I do not understand you, Marinka. Of course, I expect you to embroider my sleeves for me. Who else should do it, pray ? ”

“ You had better ask Anna, the Judge's daughter,” retorted Marinka, with a sneer. “ My work is not good enough for you.”

“ You cannot be in earnest, my pretty one,” said Pista. His blue eyes were full of trouble, and his voice positively shook. “ You know very well that I would not ask Anna. I swear before Heaven I will ask no other maiden to serve me but you.”

Marinka picked up her flail and laughed.

“ A wise vow, Pista,” quoth she. “ I hope you will keep to it.”

Her little brother, who had run after her, now pulled at her skirt.

"Grandmother says you must come back, Marinka; there are still five sheaves left."

The girl turned and followed him to the barn without another word, and in a few minutes the *thud, thud, thud* of the flails began again.

Presently Pista and his team passed slowly across the open doorway of the barn, and were swallowed up in the gloom of the narrow lane that led to the village. Marinka did not even turn her head.

"Do you really think that Pista will get Anna Bilinsky to make his new sleeves for him?" enquired Marzi, as he deftly unfastened another sheaf.

"Let him ask her!" sneered his sister.

"Now, what folly is that?" cried the old grandmother, imperfectly comprehending. "Ask Anna, the Judge's daughter? Why, she will marry an innkeeper at least, or perhaps a rich farmer, or a merchant from Lipotvar. She will have four cows to her dowry, and half a dozen feather beds, and a whole flock of geese. She will look higher than Pista."

"But there is no one like Pista," said Marzi enthusiastically.

"I hate Pista," cried Marinka.

A few days afterwards, going up to the *major*, or labourers' quarters, on an errand for her father

Marinka caught sight of the old widow, Martha Knótek, in the Schloss garden, busily at work. In company with three or four other women, she was scraping with a curved knife the moss and grass which had sprung up here and there on the narrow paths, being careful, however, to respect the multitude of gaily clad trespassers, wild saxifrages of every hue, which had found their way to these sunny quarters, and covered with a mosaic-like pattern of wondrous brightness, alleys which were otherwise uniformly trim. But the "Mighty Lady" would not have the flowers disturbed, and congratulated herself on her forbearance each time she passed that way and saw the outspread blossoms smiling in the sun.

As Martha squatted back on her bare brown heels, she caught sight of Marinka on the other side of the hedge, and immediately hailed her.

"What! it is you, little one? Come here, I want to talk to you."

"I am busy, Mother Martha," returned the girl sullenly, but nevertheless she passed through the gate and drew near the old woman.

Widow Martha, folding her sun-dried arms, leered up hideously from beneath the folds of her faded red handkerchief.

"So you would not work for my Pista? Aha, but he can do without you! The sleeves are already begun. Fine work, Marinka—finer than yours!"

The blood rushed to Marinka's face. Perjured Pista ! He had taken her at her word and broken his.

" Who is working them ? " she asked, the words leaping out almost against her will. Martha wagged her head knowingly, her toothless mouth wreathed in smiles.

" I may not tell," she cried gleefully. "*Nya, nya*, I may not tell ! It is not I, at least—you may see that for yourself."

She spread out her two skinny hands, the joints of which were distorted by rheumatism, while a goodly portion of the right forefinger was missing, Martha having some years previously been relieved of it by a billhook. The other women, pausing in their scraping, began to stare and giggle, and Marinka, tossing her head, stalked majestically away, her heart burning within her at the thought of Pista's perfidy and of that ugly, stupid Anna's cunning.

Of course it was Anna ! Her wealth had tempted Marinka's lover from his allegiance ; she had, no doubt, flattered and cajoled him ; those fine embroidered sleeves of hers were purposely worn to allure and entrap him—vain, foolish youth that he was. It was all very fine for Grandmother to talk about the Judge's daughter looking higher—little Marzi was right—there was no one like Pista, false and detestable though he might be. But let

them not think they would have it all their own way. Marinka was not to be slighted with impunity. Anna's life should be made a burden to her, though she was the Judge's daughter.

Poor, stout, stolid Anna! She was unable to account for the persecution to which she was suddenly subjected. Her flowers were surreptitiously uprooted, her hens let loose, eggs smashed in the nest, geese driven far afield. Her pet goats were introduced by night into the orchard, so that the best fruit trees were barked, her father's wrath unjustly descending, not so much on the unknown culprit, as on Anna herself. Add to this, the ignominy and alarm of seeing her own name, accompanied with opprobrious and slanderous epithets, scrawled in chalk on every available wall and gatepost, and the reception of documents mysteriously thrust under the door, containing fearful accusations and horrible threats. Poor Anna's not particularly acute brain was in a whirl of anguish and dismay, and she was quite at a loss to discover the reason of this onslaught, until a rash pleasantry revealed the identity of her persecutor.

Passing the village inn one Sunday afternoon, and overhearing the joyful squeaking of fiddles within, she was impelled to draw near; for though no beauty, the Judge's daughter was a great dancer, and her important social position invariably secured for her a number of partners. Peering half fearfully



round the open door, for she did not know but that her enemy might be among the dancers, she was at once hailed by no less a person than Pista. Now Pista was at that moment smarting from Marinka's scornful response to the summons which he had half hesitatingly made to her just before Anna's entrance, and seized the first opportunity of retaliation. But as Anna began to jig it delightedly in the centre of the room, Marinka, who was swaying negligently opposite her partner in the graceful *Lassú*, or slow movement of the Csárdas, glanced at her over her shoulder, and remarked with a loud laugh :

"There goes Anna with her money-bag. Some people hide their treasures in their bosoms, but Anna carries hers in her throat ! "

This coarse and clumsy witticism, conveying as it did a palpable allusion to poor Anna's deformity, was received with covert laughter and applause, which, however, suddenly ceased when the victim, standing stock-still, burst into tears.

"Now that is too bad, Marinka," cried one. "What has the poor girl done to you ? You have never a good word for her these times. Didn't I see you yesterday chalking up lies about her on her own father's gate ? "

"Oh, Marinka, was it you ? " wailed poor Anna, reproachfully.

"And did not your little Marzi confess, when I

boxed his ears for hustling away Anna's geese, that he did so by your orders ? " cried another.

"And you are always jeering at her looks ! Did I not see you myself puffing out your throat after she had passed, in mockery. It is very wicked—the poor girl did not make herself."

"As to that, the throat is nothing as things go," remarked one of Anna's suitors. "Who minds it ? But Ludovic is right—it is wicked to mock at people."

"Yes, indeed, the good God will punish Marinka ! " cried they all.

Marinka looked round, folded her arms, and moved slowly to the door.

"I care nothing for any of you," she cried defiantly. "I shall say what I like and do what I like. If the good God punishes anyone, He will certainly punish people who are false and treacherous."

And with that she left the place, passing like a flash before the windows.

"What does she mean ? " gasped poor Anna.

"I know," cackled old Widow Martha, who was always to be found in the midst of any village gathering ; "she thinks it is you who are embroidering my Pista's new blue sleeves."

In spite of her woe the heiress drew herself up.

"As if I should do such a thing ! " she cried.

Pista darted out of the inn and sped after Marinka, soon overtaking her, though she walked fast. He

was panting and in a white heat, but not from the speed with which he had run.

"Let me tell you once for all," he cried, as she turned and faced him, "that I have nothing to do with Anna Bilinsky, nor she with me."

"Then the sleeves! Who is——?"

"It is no affair of yours," he returned violently. "It is you who cast me off, Marinka—not I you."

He paused, struck by the kind of spasm which passed over the girl's face, and added in a softer tone and with a half smile :

"You must look nearer home, my pretty one."

Marinka started as if stung. She fancied he was sneering at her. With a snort and a whisk of her voluminous skirts, she wheeled round and fled away, the high heels of her tall boots ringing sharply on the road.

If Anna was suddenly relieved from the persecution to which she had been of late so unjustly subjected, Marinka's girl neighbours now found themselves the victims of most vicious and unmerited attacks. "Look nearer home!" Pista had said; it was perhaps pretty Rosy, who lived next door to Marinka on the right, who had officiously taken upon herself to embroider these famous blue sleeves. Marinka seized the first opportunity of spilling a quantity of fruit syrup over Rosy's fair piece of newly woven linen, which had been laid out to bleach. Milly, too, who lived to the left of Marinka's cottage,

found her clothes line cut after a heavy wash, and all the family garments reposing in the mire. A pig ate a large portion of her father's best shirt, with the result that poor Milly was beaten and the entire family disorganized. Marinka's jealous suspicion fell, now on one member of the little community and now on another, with the result that she rapidly became the terror of the place. Complaints were carried to the head agent and his underlings, to the priest, to the nuns, to the judge. Each in turn reprimanded Marinka, and Marinka listened in sullen silence, protruding a rosy underlip and shrugging shapely shoulders.

At last the news of the various misdeeds reached the ears of the Lady of the Schloss. It happened in this wise.

The great beanstack was being threshed in the field at the back of the home farm. All the labourers belonging to the estate were there, and many of the villagers were helping ; amongst the rest Marinka. She was standing on the summit of the stack when the Lady strolled up in the cool of the evening to enquire into the progress of the work. It was a bright and busy scene. The great English machine with its smoking engine, which the village folk regarded with immense awe, was in full work, booming and reverberating over the heads of labourers and onlookers. The Herr Inspector was there, and the under-agent, and the bailiff, all

assisting at the measuring and weighing of the sacks of tiny, shining beans ; the stack aforesaid, composed of bean-straw which had been subjected to the threshing process, was rapidly rising, and successive wagon loads, piled high with fresh relays of provender, were dragged forward by team after team of the beautiful wide-horned oxen to replenish the insatiable maw of the machine. The air was full of the humming of the great leather bands, the clatter of many voices, broken now by a cheery laugh, now by a snatch of song ; but all at once a new sound mingled with these homely, pleasant noises—the sound of a sharp cry. A sobbing and gesticulating girl rushed out from the group beneath the stack.

“ It is Marinka ! ” she cried. “ I saw her—I saw her myself. Oh, woe is me ; what shall I do ! ”

The Châtelaine looked up to where Marinka’s graceful figure moved hither and thither on the rustling bean-straw which she was sedulously and innocently spreading with her pitchfork, and then at Annola’s tear besmirched face.

“ Why, what has she done ? ” she asked in surprise.

“ Gracious Lady, she has broken my two pitchers. I had placed them for safety at the foot of the stack—the water-jar and the dish that held my father’s dinner. I saw her—the wicked girl!—single out mine and throw down a sheaf of straw on them, so that they fell together and were broken. My

mother will chastise me, and my father will think it my fault. She leaves us no peace, Gracious Lady ; she torments every girl in the village with her evil tricks."

"Is this true ? " asked the Mistress.

"It is indeed true, Mighty Lady," answered the bailiff, stepping forward. "The girl is a perfect pest."

"*Na*," cried the Herr Inspector ; "we must put order into this."

Several girls now crowded round, each eager to relate her own special grievance ; but the Châtelaine, waving them to one side, signed to Marinka to descend.

A slide, a bound, and Marinka alighted on her supple bare feet and came forward shamefacedly to greet the Mighty Lady. She was blushing, confused ; as she stooped to kiss the hand extended to her, indeed, her bewilderment was so great that instead of contenting herself with the respectful salute customary among adults, she turned over the Lady's hand, as the village children were wont to do, and gave the palm, after their fashion, a preliminary little tap for luck.

The action, the frightened look, the fluctuating colour, all had so much of the child in them that the Châtelaine remembered that this naughty girl was really not much more than a child in years, and became suddenly mollified. Moreover, she had

heard something of the little romance between her and Pista, and was aware that the course of true love had not of late run smooth.

"I am sure you are very sorry, Marinka," she said quite kindly, "to have injured poor little Annola. You would not willingly have broken her jars—it must have been by mistake. You used to be the best-behaved girl in the school—do you not remember how you won the good conduct prize?"

"High Mighty Lady, yes!" said Marinka, in a low voice, and two big tears suddenly rolled over her ripe cheeks.

"You must go on giving a good example," said the Lady. "I have got a beautiful banner for you to carry in the procession. You know the great procession on the Feast-day? You shall carry the banner because your name is Mary, and because you are going to be such a very good girl."

The other village maidens listened open-mouthed, with blank faces; some even went so far as to murmur discontentedly to each other.

"High Mighty Lady," said Marinka quickly. "I—cannot."

Her black lashes dropped, she hung her head, and began to describe certain cabalistic circles with her bare foot in the dusty soil.

"I have no veil," she faltered; and then in a lower voice, "I am not good enough."

"I may find you a veil," said the Lady, "and you

are going to be good enough—quite good. Now go back to your work, and take care that there are no more accidents.”

Marinka kissed the Lady's hand again, this time almost passionately, and then turning impetuously, retired behind the stack, whence she presently emerged carrying one of the artistically shaped green jars used in that district for drinking-vessels : “ You shall have my pitcher,” she cried eagerly to Annola ; “ I am sorry I broke yours.”

In another moment she had scaled the rick again, and repossessed herself of her pitchfork.

The demon would seem to have been exorcised from Marinka that evening ; she received the scarcely veiled sarcasms of her fellow-workers with downcast looks and silence. Going home in the dusk, and perceiving a figure staggering in front of her, bent double beneath the weight of a brimming pail, she charitably hastened to overtake it.

“ May I not carry your bucket, Mother ? ”

She started back, however, half repenting of her charitable intent, when she discovered that the old woman was no other than Martha Knótek.

“ *Hé,*” said Martha, “ yes, my little one ; you may carry my bucket, and welcome—the old woman will bless you for sparing her rheumatic old back. There will be a change in the weather, Marinka, I tell you ; my lumbago warns me without fail. It is better even than the queer glass in the Castle yonder.”



She continued to chatter to the girl as she walked beside her, and even when they arrived at her quarters in the *major*, she would not consent to let her go.

The *major* occupied two sides of a large square courtyard, and was newly built, the Lady of the Manor having recently made notable changes in the domestic arrangements of her workpeople. Formerly, four families had been obliged to share a single room; but now each little household, if household it could be called, was allowed entire possession of a whole bedroom, and had actually half a kitchen to itself. Widow Martha, indeed, reigned supreme in her chamber, for Pista was accommodated with a beautiful chaff bed in the ox-stable, a fact of which she was particularly proud, though her neighbour the blacksmith's wife, whose apartment on the opposite side of their joint kitchen was occupied by three generations of her family, opined that she must be somewhat lonely.

"You must come in," cried the widow jovially; "there is somebody here whom you will be pleased to see, and—and I think it is time for you to know the secret."

She had dragged the girl across the kitchen as she spoke, and opening the door of the adjoining room, pushed her in before she could remonstrate. The blind was drawn and the little lamp already cast a flickering light on the embroidered coverlet of

Martha's bed, on the smoke-begrimed pictures of the Saints, some of them centuries old, which crowded the walls, on the little wooden table in the centre of the room, beside which sat—Pista ! Pista, with a white apron covering his white clothes, a needle between his finger and thumb, his head attentively bent over a mass of shimmering blue and white.

“ Pista,” cried Marinka, “ so it was you—you yourself ! ”

Pista looked up, startled at first ; but at sight of Marinka's pale face and almost horrified eyes, he burst out laughing.

“ Did I not say,” he cried, “ that I would ask no other maiden but you to work for me ? ”

“ Ah, how wicked I have been ! ” gasped Marinka, and she burst into tears.

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In spite of the prognostications of the weather prophets, the morning of the 8th of September dawned exquisitely clear and bright ; and at nine o'clock the inhabitants of Petheöfalva met in the centre of the village, just by the statue of St. Anne. The harvest had been a good one, as was testified by the number of votive offerings which adorned both the statue and its pedestal : wreaths of flowers, bunches of ribbons, strings of beads—not very valuable, these tokens of gratitude, but the poor peasants gave of their best.

When all were assembled, the village folk formed in procession, the acolytes, in scarlet cassocks and white surplices, leading, followed by the men, young and old ; then came the children, the maidens and matrons, all in holiday attire, everyone who could afford it wearing a white veil over embroidered cap or folded ribbon. They advanced in regular order, lustily singing their curious monotonous hymns ; and so walked for miles in the scorching heat of the sun along roads ankle-deep in dust, crossing streams occasionally, and wading through ploughed fields.

From different points in the landscape other processions could be seen, each at first looking like a mere undulating streak of colour, but gradually resolving itself into a band of pilgrims numbering some hundreds. Even the gipsies, folk dreaded by the peasants on ordinary occasions, laid aside on this day their usual savagery, and appeared decently and even sumptuously clad, with brown hands folded and wicked eyes demurely downcast, walking sedately like other sober people. Carriages, carts, country wagons filled to overflowing with worshippers from great distances, raised mighty clouds of dust every now and then. Gradually all these streams of life were seen to converge to one point—a little wood, lying close beneath the shadow of the hills. In the midst of this wood was a chapel so tiny that it could not have contained a hundredth

part of the multitude that pressed towards it, yet the centre to which all their simple hearts were turned. The copse was already full of people moving hither and thither among the trees ; and when the last procession, which chanced to be that of Petheöfalva, drew near, the priest, who had been waiting for some little time, went out to meet it, and returned at its head.

The Châtelaine of Petheöfalva, descending from her carriage, stood beneath the trees to see her people pass. After the crowd of little boys, all devoutly piping with ear-piercing shrillness, came the youths, headed by their cross-bearer, Pista. A very striking figure was Pista to-day, with his bare head reverently bent, and his strong hands steadily carrying the cross ; over these hands fell the lace edges of a pair of worked sleeves, which the Châtelaine suddenly perceived were embroidered in crimson and yellow—were they not indeed the very pair that Marinka had worked for him some months before ?

Now the old men were passing, their quavering voices uplifted gallantly still, in spite of their long and toilsome march ; now came the little ones, pattering along with their tiny bare dusty feet, all bravely carolling, without, it must be owned, very much regard to time or tune.

But as the priest reached the threshold of the chapel, silence suddenly fell, and the rest of the

procession pressed on, unaccompanied by any sound save that of their own measured footfalls and rustling skirts. Here came the girls, headed by a tall maiden carrying a silken banner, which she carefully lowered as she passed beneath the outspread branches of the trees. Her dark eyes looked forth from beneath a snowy veil, and the brown arms which trembled a little under the strain and weight of her burden were draped by a pair of sleeves beautifully embroidered in blue.

The Châtelaine smiled to herself, and without waiting to see the end of the procession, made her way back to her carriage. So crowded had the little copse become that it was impossible to approach the chapel, the small space within its walls having been long ago occupied by pilgrims who had arrived early on the scene. Round about the open doorway, the windows, even the blank wall at the rear, people clustered thick as swarms of bees. The throng, which had parted to allow the procession to pass, now closed together; the sun, glancing through the green canopy overhead, fell upon the densely packed heads, each clothed in its own quaint fashion; one would have thought it impossible for a unit of that crowd to move, yet at the warning tinkle of the sanctuary bell the whole multitude managed in some inexplicable fashion to drop upon its knees, and so remained throughout the hour that followed. In a moment, too, with a

simultaneous flash of multi-coloured sleeves, the men's gaily plumed hats were removed and a sea of heads, blond and black and grizzled, lay bare to sun and breeze.

The Châtelaine knelt in her carriage ; the coachman knelt upon his box ; the little thoroughbred horses, which had stamped and fidgeted a short time before, stood still when the first long-drawn notes of the hymn floated upon the air, for music forms part of a Hungarian horse's education, and no Magyar stable is complete without its pipe and drum.

It was over at last ; the congregation had risen to its feet ; the last line of the last hymn was drawing to the close :

Ten predrahy venec, nech bude nas svedek, za to nas  
Maria,  
Vsech do neba privec, abychme sa mohli,  
V nebesach raduvat, zdrav bud' Maria, Tebe  
prespevuvat.

And at length, after the final triumphant "Amen," acquaintances had leisure to think of their neighbours. Greetings and gossip were interchanged, pipes and cigarettes were lit, handkerchiefs containing light refreshments in the shape of pastry and apples were unfolded, and murmurs and laughter of a mundane order succeeded the religious fervour of a little while ago.

But not in every instance were thoughts of secular

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matters in the ascendant. In twos and threes people still mounted and descended the worn steps leading to the chapel, and, passing through the sanctuary, reverently kissed the altar, after which they knelt for a few moments within the hallowed walls.

Some of the good folk of Petheőfalva suddenly noticed a young couple who, hand in hand, were just crossing the threshold.

“Is that not your Pista?” asked someone of an old woman who, painfully dragging herself up by a tree-trunk, was rising from her rheumatic knees.

“And surely that is Marinka?” chimed in another before she could reply. “And it is she who is wearing the famous sleeves of which we have heard so much!”

“Truly yes,” replied Widow Martha; “it is Pista and it is also Marinka; and she is wearing those very sleeves.”

“But he worked them himself!” cried both gossips together.

They were amazed, not at the fact of the young man’s relinquishing the ploughshare for the needle—a circumstance no more uncommon among this people than that a woman should lay aside her distaff for the bricklayer’s trowel or the flail—but at such extraordinary generosity.

“Ach! you see she will soon belong to him, and then they will be his again. It was the Noble

Lady who arranged it. Marinka told her about Pista working them, you see, when she went to fetch her veil. And she, Mighty Lady, sent for Pista—ah! Pista is in luck. He is to be made coachman at the Schloss, and will drive horses instead of oxen. Who knows? In time he may even come to drive the Noble Lady herself, and to wear a beautiful blue coat like Támás yonder. And Marinka, after they are married, is to help with the washing at the Schloss.”

“ Oh, oh, they are fortunate,” said the neighbours enviously.

“ You may say so,” agreed Martha, emphatically. “ Old Snázsausky is not doing so badly for his daughter either. He is giving her two feather beds, three pillows, and a little pig.”

“ Oh, oh ! ” said the gossips again. And one of them added somewhat maliciously :

“ And you, Martha ; what are you settling on your son ? ”

“ I am making a great sacrifice,” said Martha, raising her eyes and hands to heaven ; “ but the good God will reward me for it. I am giving the young couple—Ludovica.”



## MARISKA AND THE GARDEN BOY

MARISKA was the youngest of the Schloss kitchen-maids, and a very pretty girl. Though a Slav, her outward appearance seemed to belie her nationality. Her pink and white face, to begin with, instead of being long and narrow with pointed features and melancholy eyes, was actually round, her lips curved upwards instead of downwards, as did the tip of her little impertinent nose.

On weekdays Mariska wore a short linen jacket with embroidered sleeves, a gaily-beflowered bodice, and a short petticoat of closely-pleated unbleached linen under her blue cotton apron. On Sundays Mariska could be as fine as anybody; she could don at least six petticoats under a smart cloth skirt; her bodice was made of scraps of the Châtelaine's drawing-room curtains—yellow brocade that had come all the way from England—and her little top-boots were polished till you could almost see yourself in them. Mariska's feet went bare on weekdays, like those of the foal of nursery lore, and very pretty feet they were, as brown as the sun could make them, but slim and shapely and arched under the instep. But Sundays and weekdays alike Mariska always wore a little nosegay peeping

out from beneath the saffron folds of the handkerchief that besides protecting her head covered up the pretty round throat ; the arrangement indeed of this article of wearing apparel was a triumph of coquettish art, and the adjustment of the nosegay was the culminating touch. Sometimes the sight of it made the Châtelaine smile ; she knew very well that the girl had a sweetheart, for she had often heard masculine tones outside the barred window of the ground-floor room, which Mariska shared with her comrade Marinka, while Thekla, the cook, snored noisily next door ; the Châtelaine, I say, had often heard a male voice in this particular neighbourhood, not infrequently male voices, for Marinka had also a sweetheart. Sometimes on opening her window she had caught sight of white shirt-sleeves and the silhouette of a plumed hat accompanied by the smell of tobacco—for your Slavonian gallant smokes even when he is courting. She had smiled to herself on these occasions, a tolerating smile—even a sympathetic one, for she had a romantic soul. The only thing that troubled her was the fact that the grass of the lawn—always difficult to grow in Hungary—was at this particular point completely worn away.

It was on the night of the harvest-dance, however, that she first identified Mariska's lover. It was no other than Karoly the garden-boy.

Karoly was not the gardener proper—he was a

very fine personage, next in importance to the under-agent and the bailiff ; a personage who was not to be encountered every day, and an interview with whom was a somewhat ceremonious affair, while Karoly might be seen here, there, and everywhere as long as the summer daylight lasted. Now at the end of shady green vistas heading a troop of bare-footed women armed with rake or hoe ; now making a sunlit arch of himself against a background of evergreens as he stooped to weed, now waiting like a young Mercury to fly on an errand for the Powers that were. He was not unlike a Mercury, this goodly youth, for he was tall and lissom and graceful, swift in his movements, statuesque in his features. Worthy of Mercury, too, was the speed with which he carried a message—notes were generally dispatched by hand in those days—and Karoly was not only the bearer of important letters, but could even be trusted to deliver a verbal message with as much intelligence as promptitude. While daylight lasted Karoly was ready to fly anywhere in the service of his Gracious Lady ; but after nightfall—no, it was best to remain at home. Once he had a fierce altercation with no less a person than the Herr Inspector of the estate, who had wished to send him some distance after sunset ; and though the Gracious Gentleman grew angry and even swore a variety of complicated oaths in Slavonian and German ; though he even

brought out the passion which he seemed to keep handy for such emergencies, a passion that he could assume and put by at a moment's notice, it had no effect whatever on the recalcitrant Karoly. After dusk he would *not* traverse the wood ; there were spirits there, and he would not encounter spirits for all the gold in Hungary. Finding wrath and remonstrances equally unavailing, the Herr Inspector had conceded the point, and Karoly had his own way.

When he and Mariska danced the Csárdás together on the ground in front of the Schloss, they were the handsomest couple there. That was on the night of the harvest-feast. No prettier sight could be imagined than the procession of reapers which came dancing up the avenue on the evening in question. The sun was just setting, and the long line of rapidly advancing figures, each in gala dress, each swaying, galloping, twirling, as the fancy seized him, was outlined against the glowing sky with fantastic effect.

Some fifty children sang and shouted as they capered along; then came the young men prancing in twos and threes with arms interlaced and hands resting on each other's shoulders, then a more decorous troop of maidens and young married women, followed by a promiscuous crowd. The music brought up the rear, valiantly tootling and squeaking.

As the procession drew near the spot where the Châtelaine and her guests awaited its approach it parted in the middle and three very tall young men advanced. These were in gala dress, and were crowned with large conical diadems of corn and flowers.

The spokesman of the party stepped forward, and after kissing the Châtelaine's hand, made a fluent speech, and ceremoniously presented her with his crown, a second being bestowed upon one of the guests, while the third became the property of the bailiff. The musicians now took up their position, and struck up the first long-drawn notes of the *Lassú* or slow movement of the *Csárdás*, and the young men with their gaily decorated hats knowingly cocked, a cigar or cigarette protruding from their lips, stepped forward into the arena, and, casting a careless glance round the circle of expectant fair ones, beckoned condescendingly, each to the damsel highest in his favour. She, good, docile little soul, trotted meekly forward, and began to foot it forthwith.

Karoly had at once summoned Mariska, and no one who saw the pair dancing together could doubt that they were lovers. Unlike the rest of the magnificent youths, Karoly looked unutterable things as he and the little kitchen-maid swayed together; he caught her with deft tenderness when she turned giddy after prolonged twirling; he pur-

sued her when she eluded him ; he watched her unceasingly ; he murmured low-voiced words into the little brown ear that peeped out from beneath the best silk kerchief—he was in a word, too much in earnest to disguise his passion.

It was, when the sun had disappeared behind the distant blue peaks and even the after-glow had vanished, that sounds of voices raised in sudden altercation fell upon the Châtelaine's ear. Two tall men's figures stood on either side of a small and slender girl, who presently spoke in plaintive tones—tones that were recognizable as Mariska's. Peering into the dusk the lady identified the two disputants : Isto the Hausknecht, whose particularly magnificent attire had already attracted the eyes of all the maidens that evening, and Karoly, the handsome garden boy. Karoly was very fine, too, but not so fine as Isto. His canvas trousers were of the newest and the loosest, but they were only made of rough homespun, such as might be seen any day drying in a cottage yard ; whereas Isto's nether limbs were encased in cloth breeches padded so that they looked like bolsters. The two were quarrelling now for Mariska's companionship during the dance. Isto was sure he had beckoned to her first ; Karoly was equally certain she had responded to his summons. Mariska looked coquettishly from one to the other, shrugging her shoulders in feigned bewilderment ; finally, as though struck by a sudden

inspiration, she declared that she would dance with both. Each pleaded eagerly for the first turn, but with an arch glance over her shoulder at the garden boy, she suffered Isto to lead her away. It may have been the Hausknecht's superior social position, or it may have been the attraction of those magnificent columns of legs, or again it may have been sheer mischievousness on her part, but she certainly did seem to give a somewhat unfair preference to Isto.

Karoly stood for a moment where she had left him, with his head thrown back and his hands clenched ; then breaking into the circle of dancers he seized a goitred village heiress, who happened to be standing out, and whirled her into the mazes.

By and by Mariska's pretty head might be seen turning this way and that while Isto hammered and swayed at her side, and presently she, too, drew apart to rest ; but Karoly pranced past her in apparent unconsciousness of her proximity.

Not once during the remainder of the evening did he so much as glance in her direction ; not even to bid farewell when, darkness having fallen so completely as to render it impossible for the dancers to see each other's figures, the whole band marched away to the sound of the Rakoczy to continue the ball at the village inn.

Though the distant strains of music floated occasionally to the Châtelaine's ear that night,

she heard no serenading of Mariska under her window, no low-pitched male voice, no tell-tale whiffs of cigar smoke. All was silent save for a little sound that now and then broke the stillness, which might or might not have been a sob.

Next morning on descending to the kitchen according to her custom, shortly after dawn, the Châtelaine observed that the pretty little maid did indeed look pale and heavy-eyed—and that the usual nosegay was absent. A little later in the day, when making her way to the garden, she met Karoly swinging along, carrying a wooden tray of freshly gathered fruit. At sight of her he deposited this on the ground, stooped with his usual proud quick gesture to kiss her hand, and was gone before she had time to speak. She glanced furtively after him: he was now about to meet his recreant sweetheart—surely the signs of her recent anguish would touch his heart, and he would forgive her.

But every line of the stalwart young figure was rigid and uncompromising; he rounded the corner and in another moment reappeared, overtaking the lady on the garden path so speedily that it was impossible he could have exchanged a word with Mariska.

Poor Mariska! She sang no more as she went about her work, and the very patter of her little feet as she trotted to and from the well sounded



mournful. The Hausknecht, or as the Châtelaine sometimes called him "Boots," offered to carry her pail for her more than once, but she refused, pertinaciously clutching the handle, and shaking her head. She did not want Boots—and nobody brought her any more nosegays.

One day, however, about a week after the Harvest Dance one of the Châtelaine's visitors was surprised and pleased to meet Mariska tripping gaily along the path which led through the shrubberies to the garden, humming a blithe little song as she went and looking quite like her old self. She came forward indeed, and not only kissed the lady's hand but made remarks about her silk blouse, and satisfied herself as to its texture. Then she pattered away, her bare feet twinkling merrily in time to her song. Pondering on this sudden change the guest pursued her way, walking slowly and looking about her at the green leafage overhead, the delicate silvery trunks of the birches, and the ruddier glow of the sun-kissed pines. Suddenly her eyes fell upon a curiously bright object nestling at the foot of one of the trees.

Turning aside from the path she stooped to investigate it—a large cob of *kukurutz*, or Indian corn, not partially ripened as would have been natural at this season, but of a uniform golden yellow. On taking it up, however, she uttered an amused laugh, the *kukurutz* was quite hot—it had in fact evidently

been recently boiled, and had probably been placed intentionally in its lurking-place.

After carefully restoring it, the lady strolled on, being not at all surprised to encounter at a bend in the path the advancing figure of Karoly. On her return to the house she was pleased to observe that the love token was gone, but chancing to pass Mariska at the well, was somewhat disappointed to find her once more serious and abstracted, and moreover flowerless as ever.

"I don't know how it is," said the Châtelaine a day or two later, "that Thekla has got so stingy with her *kukurutz*—she has not sent in more than three or four cobs the last day or two."

"Nobody eats them," said the Herr Inspector with a reproachful glance at the English Herrschaften as he selected a particularly massive specimen.

They had indeed found themselves unable to appreciate these Hungarian delicacies, a fact which they deplored, for the long cones looked delicious, coming up as they did smoking hot, in a snowy napkin; the light-brown baked ones nestling in the middle, and contrasting with the softer gold of the boiled cobs by which they were surrounded.

Earlier that afternoon the lady before alluded to had come across Karoly nibbling one as yellow as these—evidently he liked his *kukurutz* boiled.

"Taste them," said the Châtelaine, pausing in the act of lifting one of the dainties in question to her

lips ; she was holding it, according to the prescribed fashion in both hands. " Besides," she added, following her previous train of thought, after pecking off several of the golden grains, " besides, I do not like to see a half-empty dish coming to table."

" Well," said the Inspector, " we must speak to the gardener about it—or it is perhaps Thekla who is at fault."

Vincens, the Cseck butler, a decorous and impenetrable person, at that moment arrived with the trayful of tumblers of water which is the final adjunct of every Hungarian repast. He was questioned on the point and could give no information. He withdrew however to make further enquiries, and returned with the announcement that Thekla had desired Mariska to cook all the *kukurutz* which the gardener had sent in.

" How many did the gardener send in ? " asked the Châtelaine, once more pausing in her nibbling, but Vincens clearly could not be expected to interest himself in an insignificant detail of the kind, and after replying, " That I do *not* know," in a tone of dignified protest, he retired and did not reappear.

The little incident was forgotten until a subsequent occurrence recalled it. The midday dinner had taken place as usual under the great elm. It was overpoweringly hot elsewhere, but there, under those thick green boughs, a sweet light air played refreshingly about the diners' faces. The golden wine in

the tall bottles had, like the syphons, been just taken off the ice, and the "spritzas" were in consequence particularly refreshing. Thekla, too, had surpassed herself: the roe-deer venison braised in cream had been done to a turn, the partridges with their accompanying lentils were perfect, the dish of "Niggers in Nightshirts" a fascinating combination of chocolate and iced cream, was a very *chef d'œuvre*. The trayful of grapes, green, yellow and red had just been handed round, each bunch encased in a wrapper of paper that matched its colour, upon which the name of the vine was neatly printed. Vincens had dispatched Marze to the house to fetch the water-melon which the Herr Inspector had brought back from Tyrnau—the whole combination of circumstances, in fact, was of the most pleasant and harmonious order, when a sudden note of discord was unexpectedly introduced. This by no other person than Marze, one of Vincens' underlings, who was usually the mildest and most inoffensive of men, but who on this occasion wore an aspect of dismay, tempered by just wrath, as he came hastily down the sloping path, almost breaking into an unseemly run on nearing the dining-place.

Vincens, ever calm and judicial, reminded him of his error by throwing out an admonitory hand, and Marze changed his pace, but not his expression. When he came close enough the major-domo inclined

his ear, listened to his tale without relaxing a muscle, and finally stalked over to his mistress.

"There is no water-melon," he announced with his usual impassive gloom, "and Thekla the cook wishes to see the *hochgeborne* Frau for a moment if convenient."

"No water-melon!" the Herr Inspector swore his favourite complicated oath in a staccato sotto-voce. Had he not himself brought it back from Tyrnau, and had not a good half of it been left yesterday which had by his directions been placed upon the ice?

"There is no water-melon," repeated Vincens, without the variation of a semitone, "and the cook wishes to speak immediately to the Highborn Lady."

"Tell her to come here, then," said the Châtelaine, with a little shrug of the shoulders. "I really cannot go in until I have had my coffee. But what can have become of the water-melon?" she added, much puzzled and not a little disappointed, for she had been looking forward to her share of the deliciously cold and juicy pulp. During the expectant pause that ensued, a light rustle amid the adjacent shrubberies was heard, and the figure of the Garden Boy was observed threading his way through them, proceeding down the path that led to the plane trees, with his usual springy gait. Something about his gait reminded the Châtelaine's guest of certain footprints which she had noted in

the early morning in the path that led from the kitchen to the garden. It had rained the night before, and the track was moist and soft in the shadow of the trees, taking the exact imprint of a very well-formed foot. She remembered noticing that evidently the toes and heel of this foot alone had come in contact with the ground, the untouched space in the middle denoting the arch of a high instep. As the Garden Boy now swung past, his white garments positively seeming to radiate sunshine, she glanced down at the bare feet which showed beneath the fringed trousers. She had once thought that Mercury might have had such a form as the Garden Boy's, and she had no doubt whatever that the winged feet which clove the fiery clouds must have been shaped just like these.

Other feet were now heard descending the incline : the stern heavy tread of Justice as exemplified by Thekla, and—yes—other footsteps too, light reluctant footsteps that advanced with an unwilling, almost noiseless pitter-patter—Mariska's footsteps in fact, and here was Mariska herself, her small shrinking form propelled by the ruthless Thekla.

Thekla's little black eyes glittered, her large wide nostrils were inflated till they resembled those of a broken-winded horse ; her whole aspect betokened the very height of outraged dignity. Designating the offender with a wave of her hand she poured forth her tale of wrath and woe : " The

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*hochgeborne* Frau would never credit it; she—Thekla—could hardly bring herself to believe it. She had no doubt had suspicions for some time, but still, *Gott in Himmel!* that anyone could be so shameless. She, *that girl there*, MARISKA, THE LITTLE THIEF!—in a crescendo of wrath—“had actually dared, not only to steal the *hochgeborne* Frau’s *kukurutz* day after day with the most barefaced audacity, but to-day—this very day—she had actually laid hands upon the Herr Inspector’s water-melon. Let her not attempt to deny it; she had been sent into the larder to lay it upon fresh ice; she had been seen to go in with the melon and then if the *hochgeborne* Frau would believe, she must have eaten it.”

“*Nia,*”\* gasped Mariska.

Thekla thereupon turned upon her with a torrent of indignant Slavonian. Where was the melon then! Let her answer that. When Thekla had gone to the larder it was not there—this in a parenthesis of Bohemian German.

The Châtelaine looked pained and displeased; the Herr Inspector promptly produced his pocket-passion, red-hot and ready for immediate use; his uplifted tone dominating Thekla’s own. Vincens stood at a little distance with his thumbs in his waistcoat pocket and his head on one side; Marze supported him, his face wearing a scandalized

\* “No.”

expression, and little Mariska sobbed on, large round tears chasing each other over her pretty, pale face, and uttered little moans at intervals, and asseverated : “ *Nia, nia !* ” in a choked voice.

In the midst of this scene a sudden shadow fell upon the grass, and the figure of the Garden Boy passed in front of Thekla. He had removed his round hat and made for the Châtelaine, whose hand he kissed ; then straightening himself and looking round upon the assembled company he said loudly and distinctly :

“ Mighty Lady, I ate the water-melon.”

“ You ! ” said the Châtelaine in astonishment.

The Herr Inspector began to swear in Slav for the benefit of the Garden Boy, and the latter calmly repeated his assertion. Thekla, mingling the two languages with much speed and dexterity, her eyes seeming ready to jump out of her head the while, roundly declared that he was a liar. How was it possible, she would ask the *hochgeborne* Frau, that a carl like that should make his way into *her* larder—her larder of which she took good care to keep the key, unless indeed, when being in a hurry, she sometimes was foolish enough to entrust it to Mariska. Besides was there not already sufficient proof that the little good-for-nothing was dishonestly inclined ? Who, pray, had made away with the Mighty Lady’s *kukurutz* if it was not she ?

“ I took the *kukurutz* too,” announced the Garden



Boy firmly. The Châtelaine looked from one to the other : Karoly was holding up his head defiantly ; he did not even glance at Mariska, though the latter's soft dark eyes were peeping at him from under their long wet eyelashes. A dimple, too, was coming and going about her lip, one would have said that the ghost of a smile was there, had it not been that when she met the Châtelaine's eye her whole form was shaken by such a very big sob. The lady looked next at the Herr Inspector, who had put away his passion, and was now surveying the couple placidly, rolling his head from side to side ; then she nodded meaningly. She might indeed have smiled, had it not been for the presence of Thekla, every line of whose implacable person seemed to cry aloud for vengeance.

" You did very well," said the Châtelaine composing her features, " to let me know of this at once, Thekla ; I am glad to think I have so honest and trustworthy a servant. As for you, Mariska "—in tones of would-be severity somewhat belied by the kindly interest in her eyes—" as for you, Mariska, understand that you must take nothing from the larder without permission ; *nothing*, do you hear ? No matter how strongly you may be tempted. You must leave my *kukurutz* alone, and on no account touch the Herr Inspector's water-melons. Karoly, you can go back to your work. If you really ate those things"—with

emphasis—"you were right to come and confess it."

"But, Gracious Lady," interrupted Thekla.

"There, let there be an end to it," said the gracious Lady, somewhat impatiently. "You did right to report the matter to me, and you had better perhaps keep your keys to yourself in future. Now we want our coffee."

Thekla but half-satisfied kissed her mistress's hand and withdrew; Karoly did the same, more humbly than usual it seemed. As he raised his handsome dark head his eyes met those of Mariska, who was advancing in her turn, and rested on them for a moment. Then he was gone, and Mariska coming forward dropped upon her knees with many inarticulate protests and promises, her happy little face the while a mixture of smiles and tears.

That night there was a murmur of voices once more under the Châtelaine's window, and looking out she saw the silhouette of a white-clad form crouching in the moonlight. Next morning Mariska's sweet shrill voice was heard gleefully piping, and when she went to fill her pail at the well she wore a bunch of roses and mignonette in the folds of her kerchief,

## THE LITTLE JEW GIRL

SÁMI the Jew was a most important person in a certain Slavonian village in the valley of the Waag.

That the population was industrious even the most casual observer could not doubt: the whole place was pervaded by the cheerful hum and bustle of work. Yet, nevertheless, the village people were far from prosperous, and they one and all attributed their lack of prosperity to SÁMI the Jew. A Slavonian village cannot exist, it is said, without its Jew, but many a time the rural population in this particular hamlet wished that they could shake the yoke of the Israelite from their bowed necks.

Everyone knew that SÁMI had wealth untold. While these poor human ants were suffered to hide away barely so much of their crops as would keep body and soul together, it was rumoured that in his storehouses underground he had laid by treasures such as no one in the place had ever dreamt of. He would disappear sometimes for days together, and though he never gave any account of his journeyings, everyone knew, of course, that they were undertaken solely for the purpose of adding to his ill-gotten gains. Ah, he was a

wicked man, Sámi the Jew, wicked and clever and mysterious, and universally feared. The peasants hated him, but were obliged to smile and nod affably, not to say cringingly, when they met, for had not the cunning old fellow spread his claws over every rood of land, every ear of wheat, every bean-stalk in the whole neighbourhood? He would take his tithes of all when the harvest was reaped; he could, at any moment, draw in those outspread claws of his and crush the luckless wight who had offended him. Therefore it was better to be civil to old Sámi. But when he was out of sight and hearing what things were said; what complaints, what accusations, what threats were muttered against him! Even little Rosália, his motherless child, did not escape, but was reviled—the poor innocent—almost as frequently as her father. She was a true chip of the old block, they said, a cunning, avaricious mite.

“Why, look you,” one neighbour would remark to another, “that child can count already better than any in the school. In another year or so she will be helping her father to add up his bill, and who knows, perhaps, urging him to screw us up yet more tightly.”

“Yes, indeed,” the other gossip would respond, “my mind misgives me at her being so clever.”

The little children looked scornfully at Rosália,

and drew away their short, scanty skirts when they sat next her at school. But one day Sister Magdalen, the delicate nun who was staying at the Convent for the good of her health, said a strange thing about Rosália. She had come into the school for a few moments while one of the other nuns was called away, and emboldened by her feebleness the children had begun to play pranks, and one boy had rudely jostled Rosália, calling her at the same time, "a dirty little Jew."

Sister Magdalen lifted up her pale face : "Come here, Rosália," she said, and took the child upon her knee ; then, raising her thin white hand, she pointed to a picture on the wall.

"Look yonder, children : can you tell me what that picture means ? "

There was a simultaneous chirping of many voices : "Pan Jezsis blessing little children."

"Very good. Well, do you know what these little children were ? There were no Christians then, remember ; our holy religion had not yet been established. They were little Jews like Rosália, but Pan Jezsis said, 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' "

The little scholars were very much astonished, and no one more so than Rosália herself ; she had heard of the Lord Jesus before, and had even learnt one or two hymns about Him which she was careful never to sing in her father's hearing, for once when

she had ignorantly mentioned that name he had struck her ; but she had never supposed it possible that He could have loved Jews like her, or been kind to them.

Going home that day she offered one of her companions a share of her supper if she would tell her about Pan Jezsis, and the little girl complied, relating in who knows what garbled, childish fashion, the story of His Life and Death, and, finally, drawing her crucifix from her pocket and pointing to the Figure :

“ That’s Pan Jezsis ! ” she said, and she kissed it

“ Me, too,” cried Rosália.

“ Not you,” returned the little girl, much scandalized. “ You are a Jew—and it was the Jews who killed Him.”

So Rosália went home very sad, and finding herself alone in the garden she cut a hazel wand, and peeled it, and tied it together with a blade of grass, and set it up against an apple tree ; then she knelt down before it, and clasped her hands, as she had seen the children do in school.

“ Pan Jezsis ! ” she said. “ Pan Jezsis.”

But her father coming up and seeing her thus engaged, snatched away her cross and broke it into fragments and beat her cruelly. Oh, he was a wicked man, was Sámi.

On Holy Saturday, the priest went through the village, blessing every house with the Paschal

Holy Water : the Jew's house was the only one on which the benison did not fall. Rosália stood within the doorway, finger on lip, her bright eyes looking out eagerly from each side of her little hooked nose. When the priest had passed by, she came out, and followed him down the street, noting how each Christian house had a cross carved or painted over the lintel of the door.

"What is that for ?" she asked, pausing suddenly, opposite an old woman whom she knew to be more good-natured than the rest, and pointing with her sunburnt finger.

"Why, that is the Blessed Cross, my little one ; we keep it here to protect us from evil."

"Ah," said Rosália, and she went on her way with a drooping head, thinking wistfully how nice it would be if she could have a cross painted over her doorway to keep away all harmful things.

On Sundays she used to watch the village folk hurrying to church all dressed so finely, and looking so blithe. She was never allowed to wear an embroidered bodice, or ribbons in her hair ; she was dressed in uninteresting bourgeois clothes, very ugly and badly made. Her home was not far from the church, and she could hear the organ and the people singing ; once or twice a year they walked in procession through the village and right across the plain, a tall boy carrying the cross. Rosália would have loved to follow too, and some-

times tried to imagine herself veiled in white like one of the elder village maidens, and walking demurely with folded hands. She even pleased herself occasionally by fancying herself carrying a banner—there is no limit to dream-glories, and the notion made her very happy.

One day, as she stood on the doorstep, gazing wistfully after the vanishing procession, her father roughly desired her to take the flocks to the pasture. Sámi's flocks were of a mixed order. There were goats, and pigs and geese, and even a lean cow or two. Rosália collected them all, and drove them before her out of the farmyard gate, and down the village street, and along the grass-grown lane beneath the willows; but she conducted them in a somewhat curious fashion. Once the village was safely left behind and she found herself in the shade of the friendly willows, she paused, drew from her pocket a limp and ragged handkerchief which she fastened cornerwise upon her head; then she broke and trimmed a green branch, stripping the stem of twigs and foliage, but leaving a cluster at the top; and finally she marshalled her flock, which had stopped when she stopped, and was now dispersed about the lane. Having collected fowls and beasts, she went on again, walking very sedately, holding her green banner aloft, and singing a hymn under her breath.

Poor little Rosália, she had no intention of being



irreverent, but she was bent on having her own little procession, and followed it with as innocent a heart as any among that distant throng of worshippers.

She was not quite seven years old when the great event happened which altered the whole course of her life. The village folk said they had known all along that Sámí would come to a bad end, but I fancy that most of them were secretly a good deal surprised when he was taken up and led away to prison. There were quite a number of charges against him: theft, embezzlement, the receiving of stolen goods—conspiracy even. Truly Sámí was a wicked fellow. The village folk stood about their doorways and collected in knots in the street—it was astonishing how virtuous they all felt. The Judge walked up and down, with his hands in his pockets, as though he were not at that moment smoking smuggled tobacco. Young Ludovic the ne'er-do-weel was loud in scorn; one almost forgot that he had removed the hinges from the Schloss gates last week, besides trapping a number of hares. As for Widow Satának, she perhaps made the greatest outcry of them all, and was particularly indignant at the notion of the Jew receiving stolen goods: no one would have guessed that at that moment three sackfuls of the best eating apples in the Schloss orchard were hidden under her bed, awaiting the moment when Yozsó

Knótek, who had committed them to her charge, should find it convenient to remove them. Such virtuous indignation indeed, had not been known in the village for many a long day ; a share of it was directed against little Rosália—was she not one, as someone poetically said, of a brood of vipers ?

The child had run out of the house when the police came to fetch her father ; had she been a few years older she would probably have been arrested, too, as an accomplice ; as it was the myrmidons of the law gave no thought to her. After having searched the house, they marched away with the culprit, leaving one officer to keep watch over Sámi's ill-gotten goods. When at dusk Rosália emerged from her hiding-place, and tremblingly made her way home she found a big bearded man in possession of the premises ; and immediately fled away again, wailing. The neighbours looked at her askance ; in their present lofty condition of mind, they would have been ashamed to speak to such a wicked little child.

Rosália wandered up and down the street, pausing every now and then irresolutely before some open door : she had cried till she was sick and faint, and had eaten nothing all day. Very bright and inviting did the interior of the neighbours' houses seem, with all the little flaxen heads gathered about the stove, and the mother dealing out the evening meal. " Here, my little bird, my little

love," she was saying, perhaps to one child, when her glance would chance to fall on Rosália, and immediately her note would change. It was "little wretch" and "little serpent" then.

The old woman who had spoken good-naturedly to her about the cross was, it must be owned, less lofty in her ideals than the generality of village folk, for she was actually touched by the little reprobate's piteous tear-stained face.

"You must be tired out, my dear," she said, quite kindly. "Run home and go to bed."

"But the strange man is there," faltered Rosália, with a sob that almost rent her ugly dress.

"Why, the strange man will not eat thee: he is staying in the house to take care of it. Art thou hungry?"

"Yes," said Rosália, with the tears rolling down her poor grimy cheeks.

"Here, then, is a fine piece of bread—now run away home."

"May I not stay here?" pleaded the child, gazing wistfully in the benevolent face.

But there is a limit to benevolence. Even this kind old woman could not make up her mind actually to harbour the Jew child. Why, they might perhaps put her in prison. She said so in round terms to Rosália, and finally shut the door in her face. The child went lagging up the street again, pocketing, with the secretive instinct of her race,

the black bread which she had not the heart to eat. She would ask no one else to receive her, but walked on, her little chest heaving, her eyes gazing straight in front of her, until she reached the church. Here she came to a pause, and after some cogitation sat down upon the step, and, drawing her bread from her pocket, munched it slowly, watering it the while with her tears.

The nuns were singing vespers : Rosália could hear their voices quite plainly through the door. Had they but guessed that the forlorn little creature was sitting without they would have gladly taken her in ; but the summer holidays were now in progress, and the convent was for the time severed from the outer world : they knew nothing of Rosália's tragedy.

Gradually as she crouched there she grew more tranquil, and by and by, her bread being finished, she raised her head and looked about her. The nuns had finished their devotions, but through the keyhole of the church door a little ray of light was stealing ; Rosália knew it came from the lamp which burned night and day in the sanctuary. Rising, then, and going close up to the door, as she had often seen her schoolmates do, she applied her lips to the keyhole, breathing a prayer through it after the custom of the Slavonian peasants. The little Jew girl knew no prayers, except those which she had heard her companions repeat in school, and

these she was murmuring with great fervour when suddenly she started back: perhaps Pan Jezsis would be angry—everyone was angry with her to-day. She had no right to send her voice into His Holy Place—He might come out and kill her.

Terrified at the thought, she turned and ran away with all speed, never pausing to look back till she had left the village precincts behind, and stood, a mere speck, on the border of the immeasurable plain.

When she stopped she caught her breath with a little gasp. She had fled from Pan Jezsis, and lo! here He was confronting her—the Figure at least of the Crucified, suddenly, as it seemed, reared itself before her. In her fright she had run to the very foot of the great cross which the lady of the Schloss had recently erected by the roadside. The Figure which hung upon it was life-size and artistically coloured, so that to little Rosália it seemed as though she were, indeed, gazing upon Christ. How could she have been afraid of Him? What a kind, kind face He had—how loving amid all Its sorrow. And the Arms were stretched out, as she had heard one of the nuns say once, to embrace the whole world, to call all to Him. Rosália's father had never allowed her to linger by this cross, and she gazed at it now for the first time long and earnestly. Oh! the suffering Face,

the pierced Hands and Feet, the Blood. What had they done to Him?

"Poor Pan Jezsis," said the little Jew girl, and she kissed the sculptured Feet with tears springing to her eyes. Then she crouched down beneath the crucifix, flinging her arms about its base.

"I will stay here," said Rosália. "The cross will keep harm away from me. I will stay here with poor Pan Jezsis."

. . . . .

There was a beautiful moon that night—fine and large and glowing—a real harvest moon, and a band of harvesters set out, according to the custom of the place, to reap in the dewy coolness. They trooped along gaily, scythes and sickles glittering in the brilliant light, laughing and talking to each other blithely enough.

As they drew near the great crucifix that guarded the plain they doffed their hats, and were preparing as usual to kneel and simultaneously utter a short prayer, when one of their number suddenly cried out and pointed with a somewhat unsteady finger.

"What is that—what is that at the foot of the cross? Is it a spirit?"

"An angel, perhaps," said a woman, devoutly making the sign of the cross.

The leader of the party approached. "Nay, it

is a child," he cried. "Neighbours, it is the little Jew girl!"

"The little Jew girl!" they echoed in astonishment. "At the foot of the cross."

"Yes, poor innocent. Her arms are holding it tight, but she is fast asleep. The poor babe—who would have thought of her coming here?"

They looked at one another remorsefully: "Everyone drove her away," said someone, "and so she took refuge with Pan Jezsis." They clicked their tongues and shook their heads commiseratingly. Then the woman stretched out her arms: "Give her to me," she murmured.

Rosália awoke at early dawn to find herself very warm and comfortable, but amid strange surroundings. The pattern of the feather pillows over and under her was unfamiliar; stretching out her hand she encountered another little hand, warm and moist, and lifting up her head she discovered another head—a downy flaxen head, nestling in the cushion on which her own had lain. In the sleeping face she recognized little Milly, one of her school friends; and Milly's mother now appeared in the doorway, wreathed in smiles.

"How have you slept, my little one?" she enquired. It was one of the women who had, yesterday, driven her from the door with so many harsh words. But now everyone, it seemed, loved

Rosália The whole village was eager to show her kindness. They called her "the blessed child," and some again gave her the name of "Child of the Cross," for they considered the fact of her having been inspired to take refuge there as a special sign of Heaven's favour. Others took the matter more simply and naturally, and were merely touched at the notion of the poor little outcast clinging to the Rood detested by her race. Sister Magdalen made quite a discourse about the affair to the school children :

"Did I not say well," she asked them, "when I told you that it was little children like Rosália of whom Pan Jezsis said 'Forbid them not'?—Yes, and He said again: 'Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

The children reported this speech to their parents, and they nodded sagely, and agreed that it was true.

Shortly after his committal to prison, wicked old Sámi caught a fever and died; his goods were forfeited, yet, nevertheless, little Rosália never knew want. When last I saw her, she was guarding ducks by the big pond in the Schloss grounds, and lustily singing a new hymn. She knows many hymns now, and it is said that she may possibly carry a banner at the next procession.



## THE COUNTESS AND THE FRYING-PAN

CLIVE STEPHENS sat all by himself on a wooden bench in the green gardens at Pöstyény, his countenance wearing a gloomy not to say ferocious expression, usually quite foreign to it. In the eyes of most people Clive was an exceptionally fortunate young man. He had more money than he knew what to do with, to begin with, his father, a rich manufacturer, having recently died; so that on his twenty-first birthday he—Clive—had entered into possession of almost fabulous wealth—wealth that could not be “got through” even if Clive were minded to be extravagant, but that would continue to grow, for the firm of which he was now a sleeping partner was yearly increasing its business. He was also possessed of good health, good looks beyond the average, and quite an extraordinary amount of animal spirits. He had been to Bayreuth during the “Long” to improve his German, having at the outset of his university career decided to go in for “Groups.” But though he had been decoyed to this little Hungarian watering-place on false pretences, and was as wrathful as only an undergraduate of more

than a year's standing could be with a recalcitrant fresher, it was not the remembrance of his interrupted studies which roused his ire.

He had thought himself very good-natured to notice Zelenics of Queen's at all ; people were disposed to laugh at him at the University ; it was said that the elder Prince Zelenics had originally written in grandiloquent style to the Dean of the " House " to announce that his son intended to enter into residence there ; whereupon the Dean had responded, very politely but without emotion, that if Prince Zelenics' son was capable of passing the entrance examination there would be no difficulty about the matter. Well—it ended in Zelenics going to Queen's. He was no good at all in a boat, and knew nothing about cricket, but he had a beautiful tenor voice, was good-humoured and rather amusing, and altogether was quite a decent chap when you sat on him well. Clive had always been interested in his talk about his native land, and it was Zelenics who had beguiled him to Pöstyény.

And now, on arriving at what in his present mood young Stephens stigmatized as an out-of-the-way hole, no Zelenics was there. The letter which Clive had found waiting for him instead rather increased than diminished his indignation. Zelenics was indisposed, it seemed ; he was, indeed, confined to his bed with what he was pleased to describe as " cramps " in his liver. He was desolated to fail

his dear friend, but hoped to join him in the course of a few days ; and meanwhile he was sure the latter would not find time hang heavy on his hands at charming Pöstyény.

“ Charming Pöstyény indeed ! ” grumbled Clive ; “ when I don’t know a soul, when I can hardly understand a word of their infernal lingo, and when they expect you to make your biggest meal at one o’clock—I don’t see where the charm comes in.”

It was the warmest hour of the day, and the gardens were almost deserted. The band would not play again until the evening ; the fashionable throng usually strolling beneath the trees or sitting on the green benches had vanished ; no one was to be seen except a few groups of peasants and a variety of Jews—typical Jews in rusty black gabardines, and with kaftans and curly side-locks complete. Clive, surveying them with great disfavour, set them down as “ greasy brutes ” ; which vigorous expression of opinion seemed to relieve his feelings, for he rose, stretched himself, and smiled. What should he do to while away the time till one o’clock ? He passed his hands over his crisp dark locks. Happy thought ! he would have his hair cut.

After wandering about the streets for a quarter of an hour or so he discovered a barber’s shop in the Arcade—a neat little shop, with walls and floor and ceiling all tiled with white china. A big burly man was in the act of polishing his countenance

after a shave as the barber turned to Clive with an ingratiating smile :

“ Will the gracious gentleman have his hair half-cut or whole-cut ? ”

Clive, being in an irascible mood, responded with quite unnecessary warmth. His German was villainous, but his expression and intonation made his meaning perfectly clear.

What did they take him for ? he enquired. Half-cut ? He was an Englishman, and in England only horses were half-clipped.

“ *Na*,” responded the abashed barber ; “ it would be easy for the gracious gentleman to have his hair whole-cut.”

The big man, who had been polishing his face, looked round, his dark eyes twinkling over the folds of the towel.

“ Monsieur perhaps speaks French ? ” he began in that language.

The innuendo was not very complimentary to the quality of Clive’s German ; but the latter was a sociable youth, and delighted in making new acquaintances ; therefore, with a cheerful smile, he exchanged the Teutonic for the Gallic tongue and replied in the affirmative.

“ Then,” said the gentleman, throwing out a warning finger, “ understand well what will be the result of having your hair whole-cut. Does Monsieur perhaps find the heat overpowering ? See !

If his hair is whole-cut his head will resemble mine."

With that he jerked off the soft felt hat which he wore, and revealed a head shaved absolutely bare.

Clive uttered an exclamation of dismay, and then, recognizing that he in his turn had been somewhat uncomplimentary to his new acquaintance, began in his peculiar Anglo-French a floundering speech intended to convey his opinion that though the style of hair-cutting in question might be, and no doubt was, quite suitable for Hungarians, an Englishman would not feel at ease if he adopted it. About half-way through a particularly fine sentence he caught a somewhat mocking twinkle in the big man's eyes, and forthwith his own white teeth flashed out in a broad smile.

"*Um Gotteswillen*," said the stranger, turning to the barber; "let the young gentleman's hair be half-cut!"

Then, putting on his hat for the express purpose, as it seemed, of removing it again with a flourish, he bowed to Stephens once more and went away.

Gloom descended on Clive as he presented his head to the barber.

"He might have stopped a minute or two longer, and I could have asked him a thing or two. Hang Zelenics and his cramps! One might as well be in a desert."

Out again in the mellow sunshine, and over the

bridge which spanned the turbulent waters of the Waag ; then, still in morose and melancholy mood, to the restaurant where he had arranged to dine. One must do in Pöstyény as Pöstyény does, and dine at one o'clock. As Clive approached the verandah where he had secured a table, his spirits rose in some measure, however ; it certainly was a pretty spot, and the gardens were green and cool, and, moreover, as certain savoury odours reached his nostrils he discovered to his surprise that he was hungry. He looked up and down the long row of tables ; there seemed to be a good many people here after all. There was a party of Jews in the corner—Jews of the better class, whose origin was only betrayed by their peculiar cast of feature. The women were pretty, with the pallid complexion that belongs to the type, and quick dark eyes.

As he looked about him he suddenly observed that a hitherto vacant table not far from his had been taken possession of by a girl, who sat leaning back in her chair as though waiting for somebody. One glance at her assured Clive that she was young and beautiful, with that kind of beauty which takes the beholder by surprise. She was tall and stately, with a rounded figure and long graceful limbs ; she had eyes of the deep blue never to be seen in northern countries, a dazzling complexion, and hair the colour of ripe corn—a wealth of hair, piled up upon a very regal head. She might be a queen,

Clive thought, as he looked at her. Hers was, as it were, a luxuriance, a superabundance of beauty, as though nature, enamoured of her own handiwork, had been extravagantly lavish in her regard ; everything was there—shape, colouring, grace—and over all the radiance of youth. The hand which carelessly tapped the table was such a hand as Lely loved to paint ; the round arm that gleamed through the transparent black gauze of her dress was, like the finely moulded throat, white as milk.

“A queen !” ejaculated Clive to himself ; “she is a goddess !”

He could not take his eyes from her face, but she, gazing abstractedly into the gardens, appeared quite unconscious of his presence.

All at once, however, she half rose from her chair and, leaning forward, made a little signal to a party just then approaching—a somewhat noisy party, among whom Clive instantly recognized his stout friend of the barber’s shop.

“There she is !” cried this person in German ; “there is Irma ! While we have been wandering about, looking for her, she has very wisely made haste to diminish the distance between herself and her dinner. Have I right to say that Irma is a sensible person and knows how to take care of herself ?”

As he spoke he turned towards a lady in the centre of the group—a lady tall, stately, and fair-haired.

like Clive's goddess ; with something of the same cast of feature, too, and with a quantity of fair hair ; but the wonderful colour and brightness were lacking, and the expression, far from being serene, like that of the girl at the table, was distinctly peevish.

"She is there !" responded the newcomer in a sharp tone. "It is pretty—not ? for a young girl to come and sit by herself among all these people."

"Ach !" said the girl at the table with a deprecating glance, "I feared to lose thee again, Illinor. They kept me at the ironmonger's, and then I could not guess where you had gone. I thought it best to wait here, where I knew you must come."

"But naturally," put in a gruff, guttural voice, "Countess Irma was very wise, and I am sure we are most grateful. What a beautiful table she has secured for us, Baron !"

For some unaccountable reason Clive was conscious of a feeling of resentment towards the last speaker. This person was little and dark, with an unmistakably Semitic cast of feature, and now came forward, rubbing his hands, and smiling in what seemed to Clive a repulsive manner.

"We have got the music, dear Countess," he cried gleefully ; "we have got the music after all. Ah, when a fair lady expresses a wish one can always manage to gratify it. Is it not so ?"

Drawing up a chair close to the Countess Irma,



and bending over the menu, which lay beside her plate, the Jew began to call her attention to certain items with a hairy forefinger. She paid little attention to him, however, answering merely in monosyllables, and presently asserting, with a final air, that she cared nothing at all about eating ; whereupon the little Israelite turned sulky and sat glaring round the table without speaking, till a gipsy band came sauntering in by twos and threes, each man carrying his instrument, except the tsymból player, who walked majestically after his. Then the Jew bent forward.

“ You will not, I presume, pretend that you do not care about music, Countess Irma ? ” he said ; “ you will do me the honour to choose your programme ? ”

“ Ah,” said the Countess, with a little sigh, and a glance round the table that was half bored and half pathetic, “ whatever the others prefer.”

“ Do not be so foolish, Irma,” said Illinor. “ You know very well that Herr Kraus has arranged this entertainment to give you pleasure.”

“ Nothing for nothing in this world,” put in the Baron with a sardonic smile. “ Our good Kraus has given himself much trouble on your behalf ; you may at least repay his kindness by making a selection of music at his request. You are the last person, as we all know, to be forgetful of an obligation.”

“ The last, indeed,” said Countess Irma ; a wave

of colour swept over her face, while her blue eyes flashed fire. Turning to the Jew, she said a few words in Hungarian, and he rose with an obsequious bow and hurried to the leader of the band.

A rare treat was that which presently fell to Clive's share—that of hearing a Hungarian Csardás played by a Hungarian gipsy band. All the characteristics of the national music are here exemplified : the arbitrary variations of time, the recurrent pause followed by a rush of hurried notes, the emphatic accent, the vibrating crescendo, culminating in a very torrent of sound.

Clive listened, at first bewildered, but subsequently entranced, the fascination of this gipsy-music taking more and more hold of his imagination ; his eyes meanwhile remaining fixed, with a persistency of which he was himself unaware, on Irma's beautiful face.

She, too, was carried away ; he noted, with his foolish young heart leaping, how her colour came and went, how her eyes now kindled, now melted, how even her breath seemed to come quickly through her parted lips.

As the last quivering note died away she uttered a little sigh.

" All Hungary is in the Csardás," she said.

" Let us have Schuhmacher Franz, Irma," said the Baron, turning round carelessly. The tone, however, conveyed an order.

Irma hesitated a moment, and then, looking towards Herr Kraus, said unwillingly, "If you will be so good."

Rounding his back in a profound bow and spreading out his ugly hands, Herr Kraus gave an eager consent, and once more summoned the leader of the band.

A curious little half-burlesque performance was now given, violins and *tsymból* contributing each their share of humour, varied by an occasional quaint interpolation of musical laughter from the players themselves, their voices marking the note with wonderful precision. To Clive's joy another *Csardás* succeeded it, and then one of Strauss's waltzes, played in the distinctive manner of the *Czigány*. So carried away was Clive that he actually forgot his surroundings, and at its conclusion clapped his hands in approval.

The occupants of all the tables immediately looked round, some in amusement, some in surprise; the players themselves stared at him with astonishment, not unmingled with anger, while Herr Kraus scowled fiercely.

Clive's confusion was complete when the Baron, wheeling in his chair, saw and recognized him, bestowing on him a little condescending nod before he turned back to his party.

"It is my friend of the barber's shop," he remarked in tones distinctly audible to Clive

himself. "Did I not tell you about it? Well, then——"

He dropped his voice and began to speak rapidly and with many gesticulations. Watching the play of eyebrow and shoulder Clive felt convinced that he was making fun of him—of his uncalled-for wrath, of his peculiar French and German. They were all laughing—even she was smiling. Confusion!

"Kraus, you had better tell those fellows that the gentleman means no harm," said the Baron when the merriment had died away. "He is an Englishman. He means that he is pleased; in England people always clap their hands when they are pleased. I have seen it myself in the theatres."

"But," said the Jew, with a sullen glance at Stephens, "why has he the impudence to be pleased? My band is not playing for him."

"No, to be sure; 'tis a pity, Kraus, that you cannot force all the guests in whom you are not interested to stop their ears. Think of it! All those sweet sounds, which you have paid for or are going to pay for with your good money, being enjoyed by people who have paid nothing at all. Monstrous injustice—you ought to provide them with little pellets of cotton-wool."

"Ach, Nándor, what nonsense thou talkest!" cried Illinor. "Thou makest my head ache. I am sure Herr Kraus would never think of wanting people to stop their ears with cotton-wool, and I

am sure he never thinks about money in connection with giving pleasure to Irma."

If the Baron's insolence had been almost coarse, Illinor's apology was so badly imagined that Clive, listening, forgot that he was himself the cause of the Jew's disturbance and positively blushed. The band began to play again, continuing at intervals throughout the repast; and Clive's vexation vanished as he listened.

The music came to an end at last. After complimenting the performers for their spirited rendering of the stirring Rakoczy the party broke up.

Clive watched with a sinking heart the graceful folds of the Countess Irma's black gauze dress trailing over the grass until they disappeared; then his eyes reverted disconsolately to the place which she had occupied. What was that lying beneath her chair? A parcel—a brown-paper parcel, which she had evidently forgotten. He crossed the intervening space in a moment and possessed himself of it; it was oblong in shape, tapering at one end to a point, and so carefully enveloped in paper that it was difficult to define its nature. As Clive grasped it, however, he found that his fingers met easily round the narrower part, while the other end appeared to him to be semi-globular in form. A sudden inspiration came to him: it was a musical instrument of some kind—a guitar perhaps. No; of course, a mandoline. He could very well imagine

the Countess Irma playing the mandoline, her lovely face set off by the proximity of the bunch of ribbons, her white, tapering fingers drawing forth sweet, penetrating vibrations. A mandoline, of course.

These thoughts rushed through his brain as he hurried in the direction taken by the party ; and almost before he had time, on reaching the alley, to decide whether he should turn to right or to left, he saw Countess Irma hastening back, an expression of concern on her face, her draperies fluttering as she flew along. So distracted was she that it was not until Clive had placed himself directly in her path that she saw him.

“ Ah ! ” she cried in a tone of relief, as her eyes fell upon the parcel, “ Ah ! I thank you.”

“ I saw,” stammered Clive, “ that you had left your ”—he hesitated : was it a mandoline or guitar ? He was loth to display ignorance—“ your instrument,” he added with a sudden inspiration.

Countess Irma looked blank for a moment ; then a gleam of mirth came into her eyes, while two distracting dimples peeped out in the neighbourhood of her lips.

“ Surely,” she answered ; “ my instrument, of course. I thank you very much, sir.”

She spoke the prettiest broken English, with, all the while, a quiver of laughter in her voice.

Clive reddened more and more. What had he said ?—why was she so much amused ?

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As she held out her hand for the parcel, however, his courage returned to him.

“ May I not carry it for you—at least till you rejoin your party ? I will be careful not to damage the strings.”

She looked at him still with that gleam of kindly amusement in her eyes, and appeared to hesitate ; but just as that moment the detestable Kraus came up at a sort of shambling trot, and she held out her hand hastily.

“ I thank you ; I will carry it myself.”

She took it from him, and with a slight bow turned away, leaving Clive crestfallen and furious. It was, however, some consolation to him to observe that though Kraus was evidently beseeching to be allowed to relieve her of her burden, his petition was refused.

Oh, what a morose Clive was that who betook himself back to the restaurant ! If the place had seemed dull before, it was now a prison-house—a very dungeon. He smoked innumerable cigarettes, and prolonged the sipping of his coffee till the waiter began to wonder if the English gentleman intended to remain a fixture in the now deserted verandah. He anathematized Zelenics more than ever. If that idiotic fellow had not chosen this most inopportune moment to develop his absurd cramps Clive would at least have been able to glean some information about his beauty and her circumstances.

Was she related to Illinor and the Baron? Above all, what had she to do with Kraus—the detestable Kraus—the unspeakable Kraus?

The dreary afternoon wore away somehow, and at six the band played; and Clive listened to it and dreamed impossible dreams.

Next morning came a letter from Zelenics giving harrowing details of his condition of health, but holding out hopes of his being able to rejoin his friend in a day or two.

A day or two! But how was to-day to be got through? A whole bright, hot, interminable summer's day. Could Clive hope for another glimpse of the divinity? Alas! though he wandered about the gardens and carefully inspected the crowd which had collected to listen to the morning band, and even sat out a nine-course dinner at the same table as that which he had procured yesterday, not so much as a flutter of her filmy draperies rewarded his anxious gaze.

With sudden desperation he resolved on a bicycle ride; it might possibly distract his thoughts, and would at least give him wholesome exercise, and he could think of nothing else to do.

He found no difficulty in hiring a bicycle, and set off, not in the best of tempers, it must be owned, but nevertheless conscious of a certain sense of curiosity, almost of expectation, which was not wholly unpleasant. After all he was penetrating



into a new country—who knew what adventure might be awaiting him ?

When he left the woods behind him and found himself in the midst of a great plain his brow cleared and he looked about him eagerly. How blue were the mountains—with that transparent blue peculiar to the Carpathians, which conveys the impression that the peaks themselves radiate light as well as the lambent sky above them. The plain itself was all astir with pastoral life. Here the last cross-shaped piles of sheaves were being carried away in long light wagons drawn by oxen ; there, cleaving the golden stubble, was an immense brown tract of newly-turned-up soil, a whole convoy of ploughs following each other across it. There must have been at least twenty yoke of oxen swinging leisurely along, many of them driven by women, and not a few by children. Meadows green as the water-meads of Dorset lay side by side with stretches of Indian corn, the delicate fawn-coloured flowers of which made a network of gold in the sunshine, while the curved leaves became so many enamelled blades. There were no visible boundaries to these great fields, save where a double row of acacias or poplars indicated a path or a dyke. Woods there were in abundance, and villages, the cupola of the little whitewashed church in the centre of each standing high amid the thatched roofs.

Now came a train of corn-laden wagons drawn

by gigantic snow-white oxen ; now, as Clive sped onwards, the plain was empty again, and he saw spreading before him only an immense many-coloured expanse, glowing under the burning sky.

All at once, while he gazed and wondered, his bicycle went bump, bump, and he nearly fell off—his front wheel had punctured. Then he suddenly awoke to the fact that the road, or rather the rough track into which it had degenerated, was the vilest he had ever traversed, and that he was practically alone in the midst of a boundless waste. He looked at his watch : it was five o'clock. He must have travelled at least twenty miles. Great Scott ! Was it possible that he would have to return on foot, pushing his bicycle before him all that long, weary way ? Perish the thought ! Since he had gone so far he might as well go a little farther ; he must come in course of time to one of those villages which had appeared so plentiful when he first set off ; there would be, no doubt, a decent inn where he could find a vehicle of some kind to convey him and his machine back to Pöstyény. Having come to this conclusion, Clive sat down amid the flower-sown grass of the wayside and smoked a cigarette ; then, refreshed and invigorated, he rose again and began manfully to make his way along the dusty road. If the plain was flat, the road was undulating ; in fact, as he groaned to himself, he might as well have pushed his bike along a ploughed field. Under

the thick layer of dust, into which his feet sank ankle deep, lay the ruts formed by last year's rains—the most uncompromising ruts. Clive tried the grass border, with no better results ; the grass grew in rough tufts that strenuously opposed the progress of his machine. Nevertheless he held on his way. The road must surely lead somewhere ; they did many strange things in Hungary, but it was not possible they should crowd all their human habitations into one place and leave the rest of the country absolutely bare. He must come to a country house, or a farm, or an inn, or even a cottage, where he could hire a wagon.

At last, to his joy, the road made an abrupt turn, and he saw through an avenue of pollard willows the first houses of a village. Quickening his pace, he soon found himself in the midst of it—a typical Hungarian village, with thatched, colour-washed houses, mud-walled farmyards, and the usual earthen mound before the door which is the peasant's storehouse. But there was no building that looked in the least like an inn. After a desperate glance round Clive knocked at the closed door of one of the largest, and, in his best German, enquired where he could procure a vehicle of some kind which would take him back to Pöstyény. A number of women and children were gathered round the stove, one of the former holding a stark naked baby in her arms.

They looked at each other, and laughed, and shook

their heads ; and the woman with the baby began a long speech in Slavonian, of which Clive understood not a word. He withdrew with a dolorous smile, and tried over the way, with no better result. Here the dark room into which the door opened was surrounded by beds. A figure moved in one of these and Stephens fled.

A little farther on a basket-maker was sitting outside his house busily weaving, and chanting a monotonous ditty. He glanced up with quick dark eyes as Clive repeated his request, first in German and then in French ; but he shook his head with an amused smile, and seemed quite at a loss to understand the stranger's meaning.

" Idiot ! " exclaimed Clive, hastening onwards.

Ah ! there was rather a large house, in the very centre of the village, opposite the church. Perhaps it was the priest's. Well, he at least would be an educated man, able to give a person a straightforward answer ; and in all probability too he was the possessor of a carriage.

It was now almost dusk, but Clive could distinguish a tangle of greenery over the high wall which separated the house from the street, and observed that the house itself was a straggling structure, long and low, and curiously lifeless-looking ; for the white outer shutters were all closed, and there seemed to be no lights anywhere, though in the village itself faint gleams appeared in many of the win-



dows. Clive went up to the scrolled iron gate and tried it; it creaked slowly open on its hinges, and, passing through, he found himself in a large unkempt garden. The branches of beautiful trees hung across the moss-grown path, and at the farther end he caught sight of a row of sunflowers; he could smell honeysuckle somewhere, and a great rose-tree, untrimmed and broken down, lay almost under his feet. As he looked about him, hesitating how to proceed, a small figure came straying towards him—an impish-looking child, whether boy or girl he could not tell. The creature wore frilled white trousers and a frock or tunic miles above its knees; its arms and legs and little skinny neck were bare, as was its closely cropped head. It stopped short a pace or two away from Clive, stared at him with uncannily bright eyes, and ejaculated “*Nun?*” in an enquiring tone.

At least the sprite could speak German. Clive, designating the damaged tyre of his bicycle, explained that the machine was useless to him, and enquired where he could engage a carriage which would drive him back to Pöstyény.

“That I do *not* know,” responded the child tranquilly.

“Go and ask somebody, then,” returned Clive sharply, relieved to find that he had at least made himself understood.

The child, with a flourish of its lean little legs, began to run towards the house, screaming lustily

the while, "*Tante ! Tante !*" Midway, however, it paused as though struck by a happy thought, returned, seized Clive by the hand, and began to drag him towards the house.

On reaching the building Stephens propped up his bicycle against the dilapidated wall and suffered himself to be dragged into a long paved passage, very dark and mouldy smelling, though at the farther end a chink of bright ruddy light came from beneath the closed door. As they approached Clive distinguished a curious medley of sounds—clattering sounds, crackling and hissing sounds—no doubt this door led into the kitchen. His small guide speedily demonstrated that his surmise was correct. Impetuously throwing open the door, the imp dragged Clive into the midst of a large vaulted room with a paved floor and whitewashed walls, on which the firelight was dancing merrily. The wooden table in the centre was piled up with crockery ; a basket of vegetables stood beneath ; a barefooted maid in scanty canvas garments turned round to stare at the newcomer ; while bending over the hearth, with her back towards him and a frying-pan in her right hand, was a tall, graceful young woman, looking strangely out of place in such surroundings. She wore, indeed, a very simple print dress, and was enveloped in a large apron, but the firelight shone on milky-white hands and arms, and upon a crown of magnificent golden hair.

Clive's heart stopped beating for a moment, and then jumped with suffocating rapidity. He clutched the child's hand till it was withdrawn with a pettish scream, whereupon the figure by the fire turned and faced him.

It was the Countess Irma. The flush which her occupation had already brought to her smooth cheek deepened at sight of him ; her eyes drooped for a moment, then she raised them with an enquiring and somewhat haughty gaze. Her head was thrown back, her disengaged hand dropped by her side, yet with the other she continued to toss the contents of the frying-pan with quick deft movements.

As the young man stood stammeringly explaining his presence the child rushed to his rescue, beginning in a shrill pipe to relate how the gentleman's bicycle was broken, and how he wanted a carriage, and how, as Tante knew, there were no carriages in the village except Papa's, and did Tante think Papa would lend the carriage to the gentleman, and——"

"So ! That is enough, little chatterbox," said Countess Irma. "Thou shouldst not have brought the gentleman to the kitchen. What will he think of thy manners ? Take him upstairs to the drawing-room and see if thou canst find Papa."

She was turning towards the fire again when she saw an expression of bewilderment, almost consternation, on Clive's face. His gaze now fixed itself on the frying-pan, now reverted, with an

expression of shocked concern, to the lady's face. The blue eyes lit up, the dimples peeped out ; with a sudden burst of laughter she held the frying-pan towards him.

“ You recognize—my instrument ? ” she said.

Clive started, stared, exclaimed ; finally, catching the infection of her merriment, burst into a fit of laughter.

The mandoline ! The mandoline, which he had carried so carefully and gazed upon with such reverential awe. No wonder she had laughed. But he quickly became serious again, and a great wave of indignation broke over him. What had this delicate, high-bred creature to do with frying-pans ? Why was she suffered to soil her exquisite hands with menial tasks, to scorch her lovely face over that fierce fire ?

“ You shouldn't do it,” he exclaimed with boyish impulsiveness.

She stopped laughing, looked at him for a moment as though about to speak, then, apparently changing her mind, turned to the child.

“ Take the gentleman upstairs, Rúdi, and call Papa. I am quite sure,” she added, looking at Clive again, and speaking with distant politeness, “ I am quite sure my brother-in-law, Baron de Zedina, will do all in his power to help you.”

In another moment the pan was hissing over the fire again, and the small boy—for Rúdi was pre-



sumably a boy's name—was piloting Clive along the passage and up a very dark staircase, on which the somewhat ragged carpets were so insecurely fixed that the young man tripped at almost every step.

As the child turned the handle of a door on the upper landing a petulant voice was heard from within: "At last, Irma! I have been sitting in the dark for half an hour. What, hast thou not brought the lamp yet? Make haste and trim it."

"Tante is making *rantás*," cried Rúdi. "This is a gentleman who wants our carriage."

A smothered exclamation came from the other end of the room as Clive went stumbling forward, hitching his foot in another torn carpet; and he saw a tall slender figure rise from its chair and stand outlined against the window.

"I go to look for Papa," exclaimed Rúdi, and vanished.

Then Clive once more faltered out his oft-told tale, and the peevish voice, which he recognized as Illinor's, expressed conventional regret and sympathy.

"I am sure my husband will be glad to have you driven to the station," she said; "there is a little station not far from here. You can take train back to Pöstyény. But our horses—one cannot always use our horses—sometimes they are needed for the farm. Ah, Hungary is a miserable country, sir."

"Surely it is a beautiful country," returned Clive ecstatically.

"That may be, but it is not civilized. It is dull, dull. My husband used to have a house in Vienna. Vienna is very different—but here one does nothing, one sees no one."

Clive thought the diatribe in questionable taste, and was glad when Rúdi returned with his father in tow. This personage turned out to be, as Clive expected, his acquaintance of the barber's shop.

He was sardonically polite as usual, declared there would be no difficulty in accommodating Clive with the carriage, providing that he did not mind proceeding at a foot's pace, for the horses had been under the wagon all day; the carriage also would probably jolt him more than he was accustomed to, being quite twenty years old. While he was getting ready, would not the gentleman partake of some refreshment? No? Well, then, he would give the necessary orders at once. He would not advise bicycling in Hungary. Hungarian roads were not to be depended upon.

"No, indeed," returned his wife, and launched into another tirade as her husband left the room. Clive listened abstractedly, his thoughts still busy with the problem of the frying-pan.

Presently the door opened and Irma entered, carrying a lamp, which she set upon the table. She had removed her apron and turned down her

sleeves ; the severe simplicity of her dress seemed but to enhance her triumphant beauty.

"Ah, the lamp !" said Illinor with a confused laugh ; " why did you not make Rosi bring it ? "

"As you know," returned Irma coldly, " it is not safe for Rosi to carry it ; she would fall and break it."

Clive knew as well as Illinor herself that Irma always brought the lamp ; did he not remember her sister's impatient query of the little while ago. They made a slave of that exquisite creature—she was a regular maid-of-all-work.

Why did she submit to it ? While he was revolving this enigma in his mind the sound of wheels was heard without, and Rúdi rushed in to announce the carriage was there.

Zelenics arrived at Pöstyény on the following day, a very limp and washed-out looking Zelenics, who was still preoccupied about his health. He had a great deal to say concerning his doctor, the course of treatment he had been through, and the food of which he might or might not partake.

" But, indeed, it signifies little," he added mournfully ; " I have no appetite to-day. I never have after a journey. It is the—I have—*Ach—mir ist der Magen noch etwas aufgeregt*. I don't know how one says that in England."

" One doesn't say it at all," responded Clive curtly.

"Ach ! " said the Prince, much surprised. Was it the paucity of the English language ? he wondered, or was it the unenterprising spirit of his friend which was in fault ?

" You see," he went on, reflectively, " it is not merely the liver which troubles me—it is also the spleen——"

" Good heavens, Zelenics ! " cried Clive, jumping up, " you might as well be cat's meat at once. For goodness' sake leave off thinking about your wretched interior and attend to me for a moment or two. Have you ever heard of a certain Baron de Zedina?"

The Prince, who had been at first disposed to take some offence at Clive's unsympathetic tone, laid aside his dignified demeanour on hearing this last name.

" Don't have anything to do with him," he cried, throwing out a warning forefinger.

" You do know him, then ? " returned Clive eagerly.

" Know him ?—not exactly—not now at least. I used to know him before he went—how do you say ?—smash. He is what you call a bad subject."

Here Zelenics paused to spread out his hands, raise his eyebrows, and nod emphatically several times.

" Do you know his wife ? " queried Clive abruptly.

" She was a Countess Slázsánsky, was she not ? "

said Zelenics reflectively. "A pretty woman—not ? But her sister, the Countess Irma, is the most beautiful. It is a pity about her."

"What !" cried Clive almost with a gasp.

Zelenics shrugged his shoulders. "Poor girl ! what is to become of her in such a family, and without a kreutzer of her own ? Her parents are dead, you see ; they, too, lost all their fortune, and so she lives with the Zedinas. And now Nándor de Zedina has—how do you say ?—got through all his own money and all his wife's money—she had a fortune, she ; her parents were not ruined when she married. But now it is all gone and there is nothing for anybody. They say Countess Irma is to marry a Jew."

"What !" cried Clive in a voice of thunder.

"Well, a converted Jew."

"That doesn't make it much better. Is it a beast of a fellow called Kraus ?"

"H'm, h'm," said the Prince, pausing in the act of lighting a cigarette and glancing at him sideways. "You speak warmly, my friend. Have you, then, seen the beautiful Irma ? And how is it possible that you should know about Kraus ?"

"I have seen Kraus—and I have also seen the Countess Irma. I have seen her with a frying-pan in her hand, slaving like a kitchen-maid. Are things of this kind allowed in your country, Zelenics ?"

"Ach !" said the Prince, blowing out the smoke

deliberately ; “ in every country, my dear, when people lose their money they are not very happy. As for the frying-pan, it does not seem to me so very dreadful. Our Hungarian ladies do not despise such things. They are proud of their address in household duties. My mother could make an omelet if there was necessity ; but there is, happily, no necessity.’

“ Does Princess Zelenics also clean lamps and carry them upstairs ? ”

“ Lamps ? No,” said the literal Prince ; “ we have electric light in our schloss, and also in our palace at Vienna ; but in any case my mother would not clean lamps,” he added reflectively. Then, after a meditative puff or two, “ the Zedinas are doubtless unable to keep servants who are—how do you say ?—dressed—trained, I mean.”

“ And so they make a menial of their beautiful sister,” cried Clive hotly “ And pray, why is she to marry the Jew ? ”

“ Ach ! how can I tell ? Kraus is, without doubt, devilishly rich ; and it is possible that Zedina has obligations to him. And then, who is the poor girl to marry after all ? People of our world would not care to connect themselves with the Zedinas. They are no longer at all in society. A fellow like Kraus, I suppose, thinks it very fine to marry a countess and a beauty, and it does not matter to him if she has no *dot*.”

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Clive was by this time pacing in an agitated manner up and down the room.

“Do you mean to say,” he cried, halting all at once, “that she, the Countess Irma, will willingly become a party to this odious bargain?”

“Willingly, I know not,” returned Zelenics cheerfully; “it is spoken of as a thing that will be. As I tell you, our families do not now visit——”

“Now, look here, old chap,” cried Clive, taking his friend by the shoulders; “you’ve often talked a lot of rot about being devoted to me, and that kind of thing. Look here; will you do me a favour?”

“Do you ask? Anything that is in my possible, my dear.”

At another time Clive would have reproved his friend for addressing him in this fashion; he had been very severe on the foolish habit at Oxford, and Zelenics had got into the way of saying “old chap” or “my dear fellow,” like anybody else; his English had evidently deteriorated since the beginning of the vac. Clive, however, was now too much excited to attend to such matters.

“Well, then, pay the Zedinas a visit this afternoon and take me with you. I have a reason for wishing to be formally introduced.”

“Ach! my dear fellow, you are in lof!” cried the Prince enthusiastically. “But this is a romance. I agree—heartily I agree. And I also congratulate

you. She is a lovely creature—a pearl. Go out and win, my friend, as you say.”

Clive reddened, laughed, began some incoherent rejoinder, and finally wrung the Prince by the hand. Zelenics was so carried away by emotion that he was constrained to fold him in his arms, which served to restore Clive’s equilibrium more quickly, perhaps, than anything else could have done. He extricated himself as promptly as he could without wounding Zelenics too much, and observed in a matter-of-fact tone that they would start, he supposed, as early as possible in the afternoon.

“I will drive you myself, my dear,” said the Prince excitedly. “What luck that I brought my carriage !”

The young men made quite a sensation in Pöstyény as they set out that afternoon, though handsome equipages were not at all uncommon during the season. Prince Zelenics’ smart new phaeton with its four thoroughbred horses ; his two moustachioed servants, brave in silver-laced liveries and plumed hats, made, nevertheless, an exceptionally fine appearance as they dashed along ; and Zelenics, moreover, managed his team with a skill and daring for which his friend had not given him credit.

The Baroness de Zedina was at home, but some delay occurred before the visitors were admitted ; indeed the four bays had scraped up a considerable portion of the moss-grown path before the round-



eyed little Slavonian maid threw open the door. Clive happened to raise his eyes as he mounted the stairs in the wake of his friend, and detected a vanishing form on the upper landing. It was the Countess Irma, and in her hand she held a dust-pan.

Baroness de Zedina received them with the graceful ease of manner peculiar to well-bred women of her race. It was true she had much to say in her low-pitched, discontented voice about the dullness of the neighbourhood, the bad condition of the roads, and the difficulty she found in accustoming herself to a life so unlike that she had been used to lead.

Though she had despatched a messenger in search of the Baron, no one mentioned Irma until the Prince, in response to an appealing glance from Clive, asked for her by name.

"Oh, Irma? She is perhaps out," said Illinor, looking somewhat disturbed.

"She is, no doubt, in the kitchen," thought Clive gloomily.

"Might one not see your charming sister?" persevered Zelenics. "I should very much like to renew my acquaintance with her."

The Baroness unwillingly summoned the little Slavonian girl, and desired her to request Countess Irma to come immediately; and almost immediately, indeed, she appeared, looking lovely in a somewhat tumbled muslin gown, and wearing a big straw hat,

partly, it might be, to conceal the fact that her fair locks were not arranged with their usual precision.

The Baron did not put in an appearance, for which Zelenics was grateful, and after an interval of somewhat constrained conversation he rose to take his leave. Clive noted that on saying good-bye he stooped to kiss the hand of his hostess, and with inward approval of the national custom he in his turn endeavoured to raise Irma's white fingers to his lips.

But she withdrew them with a smile that was half mischievous, half confused.

"I am girl," she said; "in Hungary you must only kiss the married ladies' hands. My sister's, if you like."

"No, thank you," said Clive, bluntly, but in a tone too low for the others to hear; "in England we only kiss the hands of people we have a special devotion to."

"Ah!" she said, blushing; then, with just a hint of archness, "But you do not know me at all."

"Yes I do," he responded quickly; "I have seen—I know much."

"Are you coming, my dear?" enquired Prince Zelenics at this juncture; and Clive, mentally anathematizing him, bestowed a very stiff English handshake on Baroness de Zedina and followed him downstairs.

During the next fortnight he visited the Baroness

and her sister several times; occasionally with Zelenics, but more frequently alone. He encountered the Baron sometimes, and once or twice Kraus happened to be there, who, on being introduced to the young Englishman, treated him with a familiarity which he found most offensive.

"You must excuse him," said Irma once, on observing the undergraduate flush with anger after Kraus had been playfully thumping him on the back. "He does not know—he has not the manners of society."

"How can *you* stand him?" queried he, impetuously.

"I?" she returned with equal impulsiveness; "but I hate him."

"Yet you—but they say—oh, surely it can't be true—you will never marry Kraus?"

"If I can help it—no. But sometimes they press and press, and I—oh, sometimes I wonder if even that would be worse than my life here."

"But there are other ways of escape," Clive began tremulously. His head was swimming, he could hardly breathe.

"*Nun*, Herr Lor' My—or," cried Kraus's voice immediately behind him. "Why do you look so serious?"

Clive with difficulty resisted a murderous impulse, and remembering that this was not the time to utter the words which had been trembling on his lips,

took his leave abruptly, murmuring, as he bent over Irma's hand :

" You will let me see you to-morrow alone ? "

Late on the following afternoon he rushed without ceremony into Zelenics' room.

" Well ? " queried the Prince eagerly.

" Well, they wouldn't let me meet her—they said she wasn't there ; but I thought I'd see the thing out, so I interviewed her wretched sister and brother-in-law, and formally asked their permission to pay my addresses."

" Quite right," said his friend approvingly.

" It isn't in the least right ; it is as wrong as it can be. They wanted to know about my sixteen quarterings."

The Prince surveyed his friend sympathetically, with his head on one side and the tips of his fingers lightly pressed together ; he felt it to be a delicate subject.

" You see," pursued Clive gloomily, " in point of fact I haven't got sixteen quarterings, unless you could count them all on one side—I believe my mother comes of a rather decent family ; but I suppose that wouldn't do."

Zelenics mournfully shook his head.

" I think it's all rubbish, you know," pursued Clive hotly. " I'm an Eton and Oxford man, and I think I'm all right."

In this Zelenics enthusiastically agreed.

"My father was all right too," went on Clive, still gloomily. "Eton and the House, you know. I don't know much about my grandfather—he started the concern ; I rather fancy he worked himself up."

The Prince was a little shocked, but did not show it.

"Of course," he hinted diffidently, "you did not mention the—the concern ?"

"Of course I did, though. I wasn't going to marry her on false pretences. When they enquired into the source of my income, I said it was a jam manufactory. I asked them had they never heard of Stephens' marmalade ?"

"Well ?" dubiously from Zelenics.

"Well, they hadn't ; they wanted to know if Irma would be expected to live over the shop."

"The shop ! Ha, ha, ha !"

Zelenics entered into the joke with keen zest, having during his residence in England learnt enough about the position of a manufacturer on such a gigantic scale as was Stephens to appreciate the blunder of the Zedinas.

"Arms. I suppose I could have arms if I chose," went on Clive irritably. "A jar proper on a field gules, for instance : Motto—Jam Satis. How does that strike you ?"

This subtlety was lost upon the Prince, who was cogitating deeply.

“ It would do at least to quarter with the frying-pan,” went on Clive, clenching his hands. “ Oh, Zelenics, isn’t it maddening ? They would rather make a slave of her all her days, or sell her to that brute Kraus, than give her to me because of those trumpety old quarterings. Where are Kraus’s quarterings, I should like to know ?——”

“ Do they know you are rich ? ” interrupted his friend. “ Did you tell them you were far richer than Kraus ? ”

“ No, I didn’t,” responded Clive. “ I couldn’t do it—I couldn’t haggle about her. I told them she would never want for anything, and that her position as my wife would be a very good one, but I——” he broke off.

Zelenics looked at him with increased respect, but without entirely approving of this excessive delicacy.

“ Do you not see, my dear,” he enquired, “ it makes things balance. On the one side rank and beauty ; on the other a charming young man and colossal wealth. I think you should have——”

“ Well, I won’t—that’s all about it,” responded Clive with heat. “ I haven’t done with her yet, though,” he went on excitedly ; “ I will have her answer from her own lips.”

And thereupon he left the room as hastily as he had entered it.

Early on the following morning Prince Zelenics

stole out of the house, got into his phaeton, which had been drawn up at a little distance, and set off at full speed for the residence of Baron de Zedina. He was pale with excitement, and every now and then turned his head over his shoulder, as though in fear of pursuit. He had, in fact, without consulting Clive, undertaken to conduct a very delicate transaction: should he succeed all would of course be well; but should he fail he stood in just dread of his friend's wrath.

He would not, perhaps, have secured an interview with the Zedinas at so early an hour had he not chanced to catch sight of the worthy couple breakfasting in an arbour at the farther end of the garden, unattended, except by the small boy Rúdi, who was rolling on the scorched grass at some little distance.

Throwing the reins to one of his servants the Prince rapidly descended, and made his way towards them. It was a relief to him to find that Irma was absent.

The Baron and Baroness were attired in morning *négligés* of a somewhat unprepossessing order, and received him with every sign of embarrassment, not to say consternation.

Zelenics positively swelled with importance; he was enjoying himself enormously.

"I come," he said, bowing over the Baron's hand, after having respectfully kissed that of his hostess—

“ I come, my dear Baron, to plead my friend’s cause. Why do you insist on breaking his heart ? ”

“ Hearts at that age,” said the Baron, “ are very easily mended, Prince. Do not distress yourself.”

“ But why ? ” insisted Zelenics—“ why throw away so excellent an opportunity of establishing your charming sister in life ? ”

“ Alas ! ” said the Baron, with his sardonic smile, “ Mr. Stephens is doubtless a very attractive young man—I doubt it not, since he is your friend ; but when there is a question of marriage——”

“ *Noblesse oblige enfin !* ” interrupted the Baroness impatiently.

“ Friendship is one thing,” resumed her lord with a wave of the hand and a bow towards his visitor. “ Prince Zelenics may consort with whom he liked ; in such a democratic country as England, above all, it binds him to nothing. But when Countess Irma Slázsánky receives a proposal of marriage from a seller of jam—you are not aware, perhaps, Prince, that your friend Mr. Stephens derives his income from the sale of jam ? ”

“ I am perfectly well aware of it,” responded the Prince. “ He, or rather the firm in which he is a partner, sells jam in such quantities that I presume the number of pots it disposes of yearly would suffice to pave the streets of Vienna. Baron, I am forced to respect the extreme loftiness of your sentiments, but many in these days would consider you



almost culpably disinterested to dismiss thus boldly—in a moment—by a word—the proposal of a millionaire.”

“A millionaire!” gasped Baroness de Zedina aghast.

“Are you quite sure?” stammered her husband.

“I am absolutely certain. All Oxford knows it. Let me tell you, Baron, my friend Clive Stephens can hold any position he chooses in England; it is his intention to become a member of Parliament; he will in all probability get a title. His wife, whoever she may be, will move in the very best society—will possibly receive Royalty itself.”

Husband and wife stared at each other blankly. Zelenics softly chuckled and rubbed his hands.

“It really seems a pity,” he went on. “I myself am devotedly attached to my friend Clive. He has the most charming nature, I assure you—frank, open, generous almost to a fault.”

The Baron looked more and more pensive. A young millionaire brother-in-law who was generous to a fault—it did, indeed, seem as though he had been a little hasty. His wife, imbued with the same idea, called out with a ring of undisguised anguish in her voice:

“Ach, Nándor! it would have been better than Kraus.”

“In effect,” said the Prince with great suavity, “as regards fortune, I should think Mr. Stephens

is ten times—twenty times—the richer man. But perhaps Countess Irma finds the personality of the estimable Herr Kraus more attractive.”

“As for that,” cried the Baroness peevishly, “she cannot endure him; and for me—judge, Prince, if I could tolerate the idea of such an alliance for a Slázsánsky. It was my husband who——”

“Prince, I am willing to own that I have made a mistake,” interrupted the Baron with a fine air of candour and magnanimity. “In my anxiety for my sister-in-law’s welfare I was unduly hasty in dismissing this very worthy and charming young aspirant to her hand. Since you are so amiable as to interest yourself in this matter you will perhaps——?”

“With the greatest pleasure,” said Zelenics.

A few moments later he was driving through the village, with a beaming face, when he suddenly encountered a couple walking very amicably side by side in the direction of the house he had just left. He pulled up when he reached them, waving his whip ecstatically.

“This is well met,” he cried. “Clive, my dear, you will no longer find obstacles. I have made explications—all is well at this moment.”

“All is well, indeed,” returned Clive triumphantly. “Irma loves me; Irma is willing to stoop to me—Irma,” he added with a tender little laugh, “Irma says she does not mind the shop.”

"I could—I could even sell if it would be of use," said Countess Irma, looking up with her great guileless eyes. Thereupon Clive laughed again, and drew her arm through his with a proprietary air. The Prince waved his whip once more and laughed too.

"Well, dear friends, receive my congratulations ; no one can part you now ; I have assured that. The Baron and Baroness de Zedina give their heartfelt consent to your union."

"I am glad to hear they give their consent," answered Clive, "and much obliged to you, old chap, for procuring it for us ; but, all the same, it is just possible we might have done without it."











